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REV. ALEXANDER V. GRISWOLD, D.D.
 BISHOP OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
 IN THE EASTERN DIOCESE

Yours most affectionately
Alex. V. Griswold

DISCOURSES

ON THE

MOST IMPORTANT

DOCTRINES AND DUTIES

OF THE

Christian Religion.

BY

ALEXANDER V. GRISWOLD, D. D.

BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE STATES OF MASSACHUSETTS, RHODE ISLAND, NEW HAMPSHIRE, VERMONT AND MAINE.

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Eastern District of Pennsylvania, to wit:

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the ninth day of February, in the fifty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States of America, A D. 1830, William Stavely, of the said district, has deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit :

“Discourses on the most important Doctrines and Duties of the Christian Religion. By Alexander V. Griswold, D. D. Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the states of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine.”

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, intituled, “An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned ; And also to the Act, entitled, “An Act supplementary to an Act, entitled, ‘An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned ;’ and extending the benefits thereof to the Arts of engraving, and etching historical and other prints.”

D. CALDWELL,

Clerk of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

TO THE READER.



THE author of this volume, having frequently been requested by respected friends, to print some of his sermons, offers these, with much diffidence, to the public ; and chiefly as an experiment, whether, what he has composed for parochial instruction, can be of any general use. The various duties and active cares in which, through the most of his life, he has been necessarily and much engaged, have allowed him but little leisure, though they have not diminished his desire for literary improvement. There will be found here plain truths, in plain language, with no pretensions to excellency of speech or fine writing. Much better sermons may easily be found ; but there is the same reason for continuing to print, as for continuing to preach, new ones. Our desire is, or should be, in every possible way, to induce people to consider, and to impress upon their minds, the things which concern their eternal good. Most other writings are considered as useless, but as they add to our pleasure, or to our stock of literature. But what is chiefly desirable in religious publications, is that they *may be read*. And this attention may be given to new discourses, when old and better lie neglected. As these are now presented to the public, not in the expectation of gaining honour, but in the humble hope of doing good, the author has not hesitated sometimes to borrow sentiments, and also words from other writers, when found to be better than he could himself conceive or express. By this the reader at

least will be benefited. The quotations are in some instances from memory, and may not be exact; and sometimes the sense of an author is given, and not his very words. Possibly, in some few instances, through forgetfulness or inadvertency, credit may not be given to the writers made use of. If through God's blessing, any good may be done, the chief object is attained; that man should have honour is of little importance.

The author, by reason of his distant residence, could not superintend the printing, nor examine or correct the proof sheets; and the manuscripts, which were written for his own use only, and some of them long since, not being perhaps very legible, he finds, to his exceeding regret and mortification, that several errors have escaped the vigilance of the press; of which the reader is earnestly requested to pardon and correct the following.

ERRATA.

Page 13, line 9 from top, for viewed read received. Page 21, line 3 from bottom, for who read whom. Page 23, line 4 from bottom, for useless read sinless. Page 40, line 14 from top, for plans read places. Page 64, line 14 from top, for example read excuse. Page 76, line 1 from top, for unworthily read unworthy. Page 81, line 17 from top, for man read men. Page 82, line 19 from top, for derision read decision. Page 83, line 13 from bottom, for extols read exalts. Page 98, line 12 from bottom, for closely read duly. Page 103, line 13 from top, for him read Tim. (Timothy.) Page 109, line 1 from bottom, for sacrifices read sacrifice. Page 130, line 5 from bottom, for water read waters. Page 143, line 12 from bottom, for perception read perversion. Page 144, line 10 from top, for these read those. Page 159, line 6 from top, for dishonouring read dishonours. Page 160, line 4 from top, for hear read bear. Page 164, line 7 from bottom, for dividing read deceiving. Page 171, line 3 from top, for temper read tempter. Page 174, line 12 from bottom, for other read latter. Page 186, line 3 from top, for professor read professors. Page 195, line 14 from bottom, for power read grace. Page 260, line 5 from top, for writing read citing. Page 277, line 2 from bottom, for Syrian read Tyrian. Page 289, line 6 from top, for reluctantly read resolutely. Page 332, line 3 from bottom, for mighty read weighty. Page 334, line 10 from top, for prayer read prayers. Page 340, line 8 from bottom, for art read is. Page 362, line 5 from top, for uncircumcised read circumcised. Page 370, line 14 from bottom, for interest read intent. Page 379, line 4 from bottom, for unite read untie. Page 448, line 14 from top, for gratitude read rectitude. Page 456, line 5 from bottom, for scripture read scriptures. Page 466, line 7 from bottom, for active read entire. Page 468, line 15 from top, for minister to read minute. Same page, line 4 from bottom, for man read men.

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SERMON I.



ON THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE.

ROM. viii. 7, 8.

The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

AMONG the trials which are painful to our nature, and peculiar to those who preach the gospel, it is one and not the least, that we must declare what men dislike to hear. The advocate who pleads at the bar, says nothing displeasing to those who employ him; he does all he can do to promote the interest and gratify the wishes of his clients. The orator who addresses a popular assembly, accommodates his speech to their political views, their interest and passions; and he dwells most on that which they most approve. But it is not so with the minister of Christ: though we address our dearest friends and most respected benefactors,—those whom, of all the people on earth, it is most our desire and our interest to please, we are often by our office and sense of duty, constrained to teach doctrines and enforce truths unwelcome to their ears; and to reprove and rebuke them on whom we depend for our daily bread.

There is no doctrine, which the Saviour of the world has made it our duty to teach, that is more generally offensive to unbelievers especially, than the corruption of the human heart; that we are "by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath," and "have no spiritual health in us." Pride is our prevailing sin; the predominant principle of that "carnal mind" which "is enmity against God." We naturally think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. To convince the proud that their heart is corrupt, and their souls vile and sinful, is like proving to a madman that he is not in his right mind. The madman must be restored to reason before he can perceive the loss of it; and the proud heart must be changed before it can be penitent and humble.

And yet there is no doctrine more essential, none more necessary to be faithfully taught, well understood, and fully received, than this. It lies at the foundation of Christian theology, and is essential to the doctrines of grace. The whole system of redemption, supposes that mankind are all by nature, in a fallen, sinful state. Jesus Christ came into this world to save that which was *lost*. His doctrine as taught by prophets and confirmed by apostles is, that all we, like sheep, have gone astray; that the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all; that by his stripes we are healed; that he who knew no sin was made sin for us that we may be made the righteousness of God in him. If human nature were not radically corrupt, and man, according to the just demands of the divine law, were not in a state of condemnation, what need would there be of a Saviour, or of any sacrifice for sin? "He that is whole needs not a

physician.” Without a belief in this doctrine, it is not easy to conceive how any can feel much love for Christ, or any deep interest in what he has done to save them. Till you are sensible of such inherent corruption, such a general pollution of your nature, as to render you unfit to be accepted as righteous with God, how could you appreciate the work of redemption, or feel due gratitude for him who “came into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself?”

As this doctrine is one of the most essential to Christianity, so is it clearly taught and illustrated throughout the word of God. In the law given by Moses, which was intended to prepare the way for the advent of the Messiah, and to *bring men to Christ*, the doctrines of his cross are strikingly represented; and among them, this of the general pollution of our nature is uniformly conspicuous; so much so indeed, that it was only by sacrifices and various purifications, typical of Christ’s atonement, that the Israelites might acceptably draw nigh to God.

This is clearly the doctrine of our church, as is evident through all her offices and liturgy; and is most clearly and fully expressed in her 9th article, and those which follow to the 16th, wherein original sin is declared to be “the fault and corruption of the nature of every man; whereby he is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil:—That he cannot, without the grace of God, turn and prepare himself to faith and calling upon God:—That we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith.” The church teaches what the scriptures teach, that our works which in God’s

sight are accounted good, are those which spring from faith and love.

The same doctrine is very fully taught in various parts of the scriptures, and particularly by St. Paul, in our text. He had just said, "I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." In our natural state of mind, when destitute of divine grace, there is nothing which, in a religious sense, is good. Our best works, wrought in that state, "have in them the nature of sin." "And this infection of our nature, (as the 9th article declares,) doth remain in them that are regenerated. The flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit." Thus does the church apply what St. Paul says to the Galatians: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary, the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." This last, that men find it extremely difficult or rather impossible to *do the things that they would*, the apostle has fully shown in his seventh chapter to the Romans. In our text he says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." And this passage also does the church in this same article apply to what most evidently the apostle means, *original or birth-sin*. This *lust of the flesh*, "*phronemtu sarkos*," here rendered the *carnal mind*, and "which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh," as both the bible and the article teach, is a principle of corrupt nature opposed to God. So that "they who are in the flesh," whose minds are not renewed by grace, "cannot please God."

This we have more fully and clearly expressed in the 13th article ; and more largely proved from the scriptures in the second homily of the first book.

But the object of this discourse is not so much to prove this doctrine, which is evidently taught throughout the scriptures, as to explain it ; and if the Lord vouchsafe his blessing, to direct your thoughts to the proper inference. This doctrine, which is so essential to Christianity, and so decidedly viewed and taught by our church, is, when rightly understood, agreeable to our reason, and confirmed by our daily experience. The more true the doctrine is, the stronger and more general, of course, will be the prejudice of mankind against it. By very many it is not candidly examined, and therefore not well understood. Some have been inconsiderate or indiscreet in treating on the subjects of original sin, and total depravity: they have extended their speculations to unwarrantable extremes, and have sanctioned inferences apparently incompatible with the freedom of the human will, and the moral responsibility of mankind. As in temporal things, men extract poison from what is given them for food: as from their bread corn, and most useful vegetables, they distil ardent spirits, which inflame the blood and intoxicate the brain, weakening and destroying the body, which a wise and good Providence intended that those same productions should strengthen and support ; so in spiritual things, that which was given for a savour of life, is often made a savour of death : the most essential doctrines of the cross are so perverted as to become pernicious errors; and the scriptures, which were written to save men, are “wrested to their destruction.” Thus by

abuse the best things may be made the worst: from the doctrines of the cross false inferences have been drawn which are of evil tendency. But I need not tell you that Christianity is not answerable for the reveries, nor the presumption, nor the dogmatism of its mistaken advocates. "What is written? How readest thou?" We refer you "to the law and to the testimony:" we would not go beyond the word of the Lord our God, to do, or to teach you less or more.

We know that to those who are not well taught in this doctrine, it seems strange, and to those who are unrenewed, it is offensive to be taught, that their natural mind is *enmity against God*, and that, without the sanctifying influence of God's grace, in them there is *no good thing*. We see in those who make no profession of religion, and do not pretend to believe in Christ, many amiable qualities. Among Pagans of ancient times, as also among modern unbelievers, we sometimes meet with shining virtues, noble sentiments, and generous principles, such as ought to make some Christians, and indeed most Christians, ashamed. In teaching the doctrines of Christ we have no desire, and we have no occasion, to deny, or to misrepresent what is matter of fact, or evidently true. But we desire that what we do teach, may be fairly understood. When we say that "man is very far gone from original righteousness," we neither say nor mean, that any man on earth is as depraved and wicked as he possibly may be; or in other words, that a man cannot live worse than he does live. And when we say that "the scriptures have concluded all men under sin," or that "there is none that doeth good," it is not asserted,

nor should it be understood, that all men are equally vicious. When the lives and the dispositions of various people are compared one with another, some appear to be good and others evil. There are infinite grades of character from the most wicked to the most upright, and many reasons for such difference may easily be assigned. Not to insist on what ought to be well considered, the influence of religion, where the gospel is preached, and of divine grace (we may believe) where it is not heard, the natural tempers and dispositions of men are exceedingly various; their animal affections more or less strong; their education and other advantages; their temptations, customs, habits, avocations, and ruling passions, are as different as can well be conceived. These will easily account for the variety of characters which we see among men, without militating at all against the fundamental doctrine under present consideration. Men may, from worldly, selfish, and even very wicked motives, refrain from conduct which is disgraceful and wicked, and do that which will make them popular and beloved. The worldly man, who fears not God, nor regards the rights or happiness of his neighbours, will, except he is foolish as he is wicked, live a regular, upright, and sober life; for by this generally, his reputation and happiness, in this world, will be increased.

The moral conduct of a worldly man depends particularly and very much, on his natural temper and ruling passion; on what he esteems the supreme good, and the idol to which his heart and his life are devoted. Among the ancient Pagans the homage which they respectively paid to their divinities corresponded with the character of the deity to which it was offered. The

worship of Bacchus produced drunkenness; and that of Venus impurity; and so of others. And the like is still true: the lives of men are generally thus conformed to their favourite idols; in which, as our Saviour observes, “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” Happy would it be if the lives of Christians were as consistent with their holy profession, as other men are in their favourite pursuits. If the love of riches predominates, to the acquisition of wealth we are sure to see the hours devoted. If ambition inflames the breast, every art and effort are directed towards the attainment of the favourite object. Some think that their purpose will best be obtained by being upright and honourable in all their dealings; others, by deviating from what is equitable and just, hope more speedily to attain their favourite object. They who have much regard to their reputation, will naturally avoid what is accounted mean and disgraceful; and will do that which is popular, and likely to gain applause. From the love of praise, thousands are liberal and beneficent. There is no act of generosity; no course of prudence; no self-denial; nor any nobleness of spirit, so called, to which men may not very naturally be excited and induced by selfishness and love of this present world. We willingly concede to nature whatever can reasonably be demanded on her behalf.

But still, after all these concessions, it may be true, as the scriptures teach, that *in our flesh there is no good thing*. What we do from selfishness or pride;—to give ourselves pleasure, or to advance our interest or fame, however generous, or noble, or good, it may seem to men, and though it is according to worldly wis-

dom, in a religious view, or in God's sight, is *not good*. The best works so done, not being according to the will, or revealed word of God, *have in them the nature of sin*. The doctrine of Christ is, "To be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." And this last, *to be spiritually minded*, is "that which by nature we cannot have." It is a new principle infused into the heart by the operation of divine grace. Nature can give us but one heart or one spirit, and that evidently is worldly and selfish. If men in their natural state, that is, without the influence of a religious faith, live well, in regard to scandalous vices, they still live to the world and are not conformed to the truth of God. Examine distinctly, and ever so carefully, all the virtues of irreligious men; their different degrees of prudence; their various objects of pursuit; the idols to which their homage is addressed, or that which they prize and pursue as the greatest good, it will be found that self still predominates. The man who, to make himself esteemed, to gain the affection of his fellow creatures, or even to quiet the reproofs of his conscience, by doing something meritorious, is liberal, beneficent, or patriotic, may be as destitute of grace, of the love of God, and of what our Saviour admits to be goodness, as another who lusts for riches, or a third who is ambitious of honour, or power. The holy scriptures allow of nothing as virtuous and morally good but what proceeds from the principle of love: not the love of ourselves; but of God, and of our fellow creatures:—the love of men, not because they love us, or can increase our pleasure; but because they are God's creatures, and from true benevolence. Hence "love is the fulfilling of the

whole law.” To love God with all our faculties and powers, is the first and great commandment. And the second, which is like it, is to love our neighbour as ourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. What is done in obedience or conformity to these two commandments, is good. And when we depart from them; when the love of God is not with us a ruling motive, and we do not love our neighbour as ourselves, all our deeds, however splendid or popular with men, in God’s sight *have in them the nature of sin.*

And well may we teach, without fear of contradiction, that this principle of true love no man has from nature. Without the grace of God, we do not love him, nor live to his glory. We have not from nature any desire to commune with God, nor to be conformed to his will. Pride and vanity, self-love and self-will, are natural to all the human race. Who can deny that in our flesh dwelleth an aversion to spiritual things? Or, as the apostle elsewhere expresses it, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God?” Who does not know and daily see that the hearts of men must be changed before they can relish, or with satisfaction converse, on such momentous and most interesting subjects, as God, and Christ, and the doctrines of his cross? The grace of God, and the aid and operation of his Holy Spirit and the salvation of our own souls by faith in Christ, are subjects which we naturally dislike. And what is the cause of this aversion to things which ought of all things most to interest our hearts? We have not the like antipathy to any other subjects; not even to things the most fanciful and absurd; not even to

things the most horrid and vile. We are naturally pleased with improbable, inconsistent and romantic tales: we delight to read and to hear of battles and murder, and the most abominable arts of human wickedness. It is only to spiritual things revealed from God, that we have this strange distaste. And is not this evident fact, a clear proof, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God?”

This natural *enmity* is, we know, more evident in some than in others. Some people are possessed of such liberal sentiments, and such amiable dispositions, as gain our admiration, and merit praise. But such, however much by men admired, cannot “receive the things of God” without his grace. The seeds of pride and enmity lie buried in our fallen nature. In different people, the growth is different, depending on a thousand circumstances; but the same radical nature is common to all, and the most amiable infidel needs a change of heart, no less than the notorious sinner. When a man, who has lived what we call a good moral life, is converted to the Christian faith, the change, to worldly people may be scarcely visible; yet to himself and to all experienced Christians, it is very obvious. He now perceives that he has been blind and sinful, and that his best deeds need forgiveness. He is now sensible that “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” Motives and deeds, in which he once gloried, he now views with shame. He feels a change: his motives, his views, his hopes, are different: “Old things are done away: behold all things are become new.”

.The sanctification of the heart is, however, a progressive, and too often a very slow work. It sometimes

dawns for a season, and then seems almost to expire: at others it is wavering and scarce discernible. Some Christians are too ignorant of the doctrines of Christ, and others too neglectful of their duty. The lives of some worldly people will rise in judgment, and condemn many “who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.” There may, however, be the root of a right faith, when the fruits are shamefully deficient. Many who do not wholly fall away from their steadfastness, by their careless living, “give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.”

Some we know have attempted to show, that the natural propensity of mankind is not, as the scriptures teach, to evil, but to good. But the attempt is not more opposed to God’s word than to common sense, and to what we continually feel and see. The time will not admit of our entering into this part of the subject; but nothing is easier than to show, that the most abundant and deplorable proofs of human depravity are continually, and by all to be seen. Though we begin with earliest infancy, and use all manner of arts and means and powers to restrain men from evil, and to force or persuade, or some way induce them to do justly and live well; they are all but very imperfectly sufficient to control even the outward conduct of men. What are all our censures and reproofs, our penal statutes and other laws and governments, our courts and prisons and executions, and ten times more which might be added, but so many proofs that “the heart of man is only evil continually?” The wisest of

men have been sensible of this depravity: they have felt it themselves, and seen and condemned it in others. The ancient philosophers and the best among the heathen, have attempted to account for it, some by the doctrine of transmigration, supposing that we are placed in such a state, as a punishment for sins committed in some previous existence, which we have before passed through. Others have taught that there are two gods, or two ruling principles, the one good and the other evil, which they thought best accounted for the wickedness and folly so prevalent in the world.

But what has been said is enough, and more than enough, to convince those whose hearts the Lord has opened to receive the doctrines of the cross. Nothing but the grace of God is sufficient to give men a realizing sense, that their *carnal* or natural mind is *enmity against God*. The remaining time which we now have, will be most profitably employed in making improvement from the view already taken.

And *first* it follows, that salvation is from the grace of God, through faith in Christ, who “is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Though we are to maintain good works, we cannot trust in what we do, as meriting salvation. While our works have in them the nature of sin, they cannot answer the demands of God’s law. What is required of us, that we may be saved in Christ, is to feel that we are sinners, justly condemned by the laws of God; to repent of our sins, or in other words, to abhor and forsake what his word condemns; to receive with thankfulness the Saviour who he has mercifully given us; to trust for salvation in Christ alone; to become his disciples; to obey all his precepts; submit to his

righteousness; follow his example; or, expressing all in few words, “to live a *life of faith* in the Son of God.”

But this we cannot truly do, till our hearts are changed or renovated; till our natural “enmity against God” is so subdued, that we love what he commands, and desire, above all things, what he has promised in Jesus Christ. Of this we must feel assured, that “they who are in the flesh, cannot please God.” While supremely we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us: and while the love of the Father is not in us, we cannot be truly Christians. “Ye must be born again.” Indeed it is the natural effect of a faith in Christ, to renew the heart, and to produce both the love of God, and obedience to his laws: we are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” Faith comes by hearing that word, “and by the Holy Spirit grafting it inwardly in the heart;” and it produces good works, as naturally as a tree does its proper fruit. Indeed, the one great duty of a Christian, is *to live to God*: and the chief doctrine is, that *the just live by faith*. It is evident to our own reason, that we must believe what Christ has taught and done to save us, before we can, in the nature of the thing, do what he requires of those who would be saved.

As the heart is renewed by faith, the change of course will be more or less visible, according to a man’s former course of life, and the strength and soundness of his faith. Where faith is unsound or weak, the fruits will be less perfect, or less abundant. We may not in every case, be able to distinguish the

renewed mind from those which are at enmity with God. "Nevertheless," as our apostle says, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, *The Lord knoweth them that are his*: and (this also,) *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.*" Let us rest on this *foundation*: use all diligence in departing from whatever is contrary to the doctrine of Christ; and solace ourselves with the assurance, that however imperfect be our knowledge, God perfectly sees who believe his word, and do his will. But whatever degree of perfection we may obtain, all boasting is excluded; to God's grace must the praise be ascribed. The Christian is not characterised by any consciousness of his own goodness, but rather by his sense of sin; by his penitence, humility and love. He does not, like the boasting pharisee, thank God that he is not like other men; but rather prays in humble hope, "God be merciful to me a *sinner*."

It is often made an objection to Christianity, and a melancholy one it is, that some Christians live no better than other men. In regard to some professors, we are compelled to acknowledge that the objection is just. But let it still be remembered, that Christians do not boast of perfection, nor pretend to be wholly free from sin. The apostle in the chapter next preceding our text, has set this matter in its true light. But if the Christian be not of all men the most righteous, he is of all the most penitent. What we hope is, not to be perfect and useless, but to obtain "that righteousness which is by faith;" or, which is the same thing, to "live a life of faith in the Son of God." A good Christian is chiefly dis-

tinguished by repentance, and faith, and hope, and charity. If in this world he becomes perfect in any thing, it is in love. He has in his heart the principle of holiness, counteracted indeed to a mournful degree by indwelling corruption: the flesh lusteth against the Spirit: when he would do good, evil is present with him. But *with his mind he serves God*: he loves his Saviour, and truly desires in all things to be conformed to his righteousness. If through carelessness and frailty he falls into sin, his conscience is alive: he repents and is more vigilant. What chiefly remains, and is of far the greatest importance, is that the natural enmity against God in our own heart be subdued; that we obtain that renewal of the mind which is most of all essential to our hope in Christ. "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." The scriptures teach that "the friendship of the world, is enmity with God." An inordinate affection for temporal things is inconsistent with the love of God. They who do not love God may fear his displeasure: they may desire to appease his wrath; to conciliate his favour: they may *do many things* because God commands them, and yet dislike his government: his service may be irksome; his laws a painful restraint. Whenever you feel any thing of this sort, you may reckon it as the remains of this enmity. If you are wholly reconciled to God, if the enmity is subdued, you will love his service; you will delight, as the psalmist did, in the way of God's commandments. A repugnance to spiritual things, is the sure characteristic of a *carnal mind*. The scriptures speak of no neutral ground; no middle state between loving God, and being at enmity with him. If we are

not for him, we are against him : and we gather with him, or scatter abroad. When a man lives well, or acts according to God's commands, charity will incline us to believe that it is from a good motive ; from the love of God. But he may do what God commands, because he is possessed of honourable sentiments, or despises what is vicious. Keep this distinction ever in your view : "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh ; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." Here is the difference between the carnal and the spiritual mind ; the natural man, and the disciple of Christ ; the one lives to himself, the other to God. From which motive do we act ? Is the Lord our God, or are his enemies our idols ? God grant that we may be of those "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and are in Jesus Christ." Amen.

SERMON II.



THE FAITHFUL SAYING.

1 TIM. i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

IN this busy world are various reports in continual circulation. Mankind, impelled either by the desire of knowledge or idle curiosity, spend a great part of their "time in telling or hearing some *new thing*." But few, however, of these reports, are worth the time and pains which they cost, either to tell or to hear them. Many things which are confidently reported, and men listen to with eager attention, are false and totally unfounded. Others are so exaggerated or misrepresented, that they deceive those who credit them, and are often injurious to the characters of our neighbours. Others still are so trivial and unimportant, as to be totally unworthy of any serious regard. And of those which are of a more serious nature, the greater part are such as do not concern ourselves, and in most instances, it would be better for us, and for society, if we did not concern ourselves with them. But St. Paul tells you, in the text now

read, that there is a report, which is neither false, nor doubtful, nor uninteresting: it is founded in the truth of God, and deeply concerns every living soul: it is a *faithful saying*, and worthy of all *acceptation*.

This faithful saying is, *that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*. It is a saying which has no claim to novelty: it is found throughout the holy scriptures; it is the subject of the whole bible; it has been very extensively reported for almost two thousand years; and now, at this blessed time, it is throughout the world proclaimed by thousands, and twice ten thousand tongues. But such is its vast importance, that it is still “worthy of all men to be received;” and by us especially, who are here assembled. And I propose, the Lord permitting, to speak first, of the *nature*; and, secondly, of the *character* of this “faithful saying.”

I. In considering the *nature of this report*, the divine person who is the subject of these good tidings, is worthy of our first and particular regard. This person is Christ Jesus; a person the most wonderful, and to us the most interesting of all beings. He is the Eternal Word or Wisdom of the Deity, by whom, and for whom all things were made, and are still upheld. He took our nature, “was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” And thus he became Christ, or Messiah, anointed of God as our Prophet, Priest, and King. And he took the name Jesus, as being our Saviour. But by this condescension, his divine nature is not, and cannot be degraded. In this character of Christ Jesus, and as our advocate with the Father, “all power is given unto him in heaven and

on earth.” And “when he ascended on high,” he was “glorified with the glory which he had with his Father, before the world was.” And it is God’s will, that to this name Jesus, “every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth.”

How wonderful then it is, and how should it engage our deepest attention. that this person, Christ Jesus, *came into the world!* “Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.” He came into the world which he had made, and placed himself on a level with the most unworthy of his creatures. “The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” But “who shall declare his generation?” Who can explain the mystery of his holy incarnation? To define the nature of God, or comprehend the union of human and divine in the person of Christ, is beyond the power of human wisdom. We must confess, with the apostle, that *great* is this *mystery* of godliness. But the fact,—this astonishing truth, that “he came into the world,” is not more astonishing, than it is intelligible. “For us men and for our salvation, he, (the Son of God,) came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost.” That Christ should be made of a woman, is no more difficult to be understood, than that the first Adam should be formed of the dust of the earth. Nor is the union of the divine and human natures, more mysterious than the union between the soul and body in our own person.

The apostle tells us further for what *purpose* this wonderful person, “the Lord from heaven,” thus

demeaned himself to come into this world; to take our nature, and become in one person the Lord Jesus Christ; it was a purpose the most interesting, the most benevolent and astonishing that can be conceived; it was *to save sinners*. No other person ever came into this world, nor probably into any world, on such an errand. The scriptures teach that “we all have *sinned* ;” that there is none who doeth good perfectly; no, not one. St. Paul we justly deem one of the best of men, but he declares himself to be *the chief of sinners* ; to be one who had wickedly transgressed, and had the utmost need of a Saviour. And generally the best of men have been most sensible of their unworthiness, and most forward to acknowledge the justice of the sentence which “has passed upon all men *because all have sinned* .”

What a wonder then is this, that such a person should come into this world, and on such an errand; that God should so love the world as to send into it his own Son, not to condemn, but to save it; to save his enemies who were then in arms against him; sinners who were violating his laws, despising his authority, spurning from them his offered mercy, and persecuting the Saviour in his own person even unto death! Yes, “God commended his love to us in that, even whilst we were yet *sinners*, Christ died for us.” His love was measured, not by our merits, but by his own goodness. It was because the Lord in his nature is merciful, long-suffering, of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save its sinful inhabitants. Though the meanness of our state be so infinitely beneath his dignity, and its sinfulness so totally unworthy his care,

yet for us men and to save our souls from sin and death, he came down from heaven; he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death.” He divests himself of exterior majesty, to raise us to glory; he dies that we may live; he puts on mortal, to clothe us with immortality; endures the pains of the cross, to save us from hopeless perdition.

Such and so wonderful, so exceedingly interesting, and all concerning, is the *nature* of this saying which is so often repeated in your ears; which was first proclaimed by Jesus Christ in his own person, and soon, by his holy apostles, preached and taught throughout the earth. It is still proclaimed through many nations, and will be still proclaimed, while men have souls to be saved, “even to the end of the world.”

II. Such being the nature of this saying, let us next attend to its *character*; which, as given in our text, is, that it is *faithful* and *worthy of all acceptance*: and no man has ever lived, who was more capable of forming a right judgment respecting it, or better qualified to ascertain, or more sure to give its true character, than St. Paul. Its evidences were all before him; many of the principal facts on which its truth is founded were within his knowledge. He had all the talents, and means, and motives, necessary and proper for investigating its divine authority; and most fully was he convinced: he saw no possible room for doubt: he was ready to stake his life upon the truth of it: and he does not hesitate most solemnly to assure us,

First, That “this is a *faithful* saying.” And certainly if it were not so; if it were not authenticated by rational and indubitable testimony, it could not with propriety be received. God, who equally abounds in wisdom and in mercy; who is true no less than holy, does not demand of us faith without light, nor zeal without knowledge. This most astonishing saying, which, through the Lord’s merciful goodness, is spread abroad in the earth, for the comfort and salvation of mankind, comes attested with full and satisfactory evidence of its veracity. We do not “follow cunningly devised fables,” when we declare unto you the word of God. You are not called upon to credit the mere word of any preacher or apostle or prophet; no, nor of Jesus Christ himself: “If I do not (saith he) the *works* of him that sent me, believe me not.” He, though clothed with all power in heaven and on earth, claims not to be accredited as the messenger of God, and the Saviour of the world, but as he exhibited the proper testimonials of his high office. That he came into this world to save sinners; that through the merits of his righteousness, and faith in his blood, we have peace with God, and eternal life, is a faithful and true report, which, with undoubting confidence, may be relied upon. The evidence of its truth has been accumulating from the foundation of the world. To the oldest man, to the very first *sinner*, was it revealed, that a Saviour, “made of a woman,” should in time destroy the power of sin. Two thousand years before he came into the world did he covenant with Abraham, that of his seed particularly should be this Christ Jesus, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. Moses was afterwards raised up to be a wonderful

type of this Saviour; and by him a ritual law was given and ordinances established, which astonishingly prefigured the doctrines of Christ, and the efficacy of his cross. And by the journeying of the chosen people Israel from Egypt to Canaan, and their trials, rewards and punishments, under the conduct of Moses, and by a miraculous Providence, the perils and duties and hopes of a Christian life, are most accurately symbolized and delineated. To him, the same Saviour, bear all the prophets witness; their predictions are innumerable, and for eighteen centuries have been in continual fulfilment. And what might we not say of “the works of his Father” which himself did; and the success of the apostles, whom, under circumstances the most discouraging, he sent through the world? There is no species of evidence wanting, to authenticate the certainty, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. The internal evidence of this truth is very extensive, and very convincing. The pure nature of Christ’s religion, its powerful tendency to renew the heart, to reform the life, to exalt the moral character of man, to produce all manner of virtue and good feeling, and the very highest felicity of which man, and of which society are capable in this present world, the wonderful correspondence which the gospel evidently has to all the preceding dispensations of God’s providence, its perfect adaptation to the necessities, and to the moral state of mankind, as also the manner and the instruments of its promulgation, all unite to assure us that “this is a *faithful* saying.” God has indeed and most assuredly sent his only begotten Son into this world, who has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. It is the Lord’s doing, and

of course it is marvellous in our eyes; and it is also true and steadfast. Heaven and earth may pass away, but this saying shall not pass away.

And if it be a faithful saying; if the Lord be thus merciful, and “has done such great things for us,” and for our salvation, what the apostle further declares of its character, cannot be questioned; That it is *worthy of all acceptation*, or as we have it rendered in our communion service, “worthy of all men to be received.” It is worthy, very worthy to be received, by all men who desire to be happy themselves, or to see others happy; for the many and great blessings and comforts which it confers upon men, and upon society in this present world. The gospel brings with it, as an angel from heaven declared, “peace on earth, and good will towards men.” If this saying were indeed by all men received; if all people living, were in faith and practice truly Christians, the lost image of God in the soul of man would be restored, and this earth again be a paradise. Far the greater part of the pains and sorrows and other miseries of this life, would be banished from the world, and the fabulous accounts of a golden age would be realized. Indeed, it is one of the most remarkable properties of the gospel, and one of the most convincing proofs that it is of God, that *by all men it CAN be received*; that it is adapted to every state of human society, and to the case of every individual. Its simple truths and saving doctrines, can easily descend to the understandings, and sanctify the hearts of the lowest grades of the human race; and not only will they reach, but very much refine and exalt the highest. They who

are well acquainted with Christianity, must perceive that it is calculated to suit and to produce a higher, more refined, and perfect state of society than this world, since the fall of man, has ever seen. And this I doubt not, is to be its ultimate tendency. The words of Christ, that his kingdom is like a little leaven operating in a large mass of meal, till the whole is fermented, shall yet be fulfilled. Not only from the scriptures, but from the present state and appearance of the world, we may well believe that the gospel of Christ is to be made the instrument of civilizing the whole earth, and uniting all its nations and languages in commerce and religion, as one great family. Then, we may believe, will “pure and undefiled religion” be better understood, and better practised, and mankind will far more generally be convinced, that it is *worthy of all acceptation*. And this improved, and generally diffused state of knowledge and liberty, of morals and religion, will probably be the true millennium.

But that which, far above every other consideration, renders this saying *worthy of all men to be received*, is its power to save the soul with an everlasting salvation; it will prepare us to be members of a family; of a society far more numerous than all the inhabitants of this earth, and infinitely more perfect and happy than any state which we can hope to attain in this present life. In this view, who is not deeply interested in these good tidings? Who is there not included under the appellation of sinners? Have you not violated the laws of God? Are you prepared in your own merits, and by your own strength, to stand before his judgment? Can we save ourselves,

or is there any other name but Christ's given under heaven, whereby we can be saved? Shut your bible, and what then can you see in the whole frame of nature to satisfy the cravings of your immortal soul? What assurance can you find of a blessed immortality? What comfort or consolation to support you in the trials of life? No: well may you say with Peter, "To whom else shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Certainly this is a saying worthy of you and of all men to be received. There is no other Saviour offered; there is no hope for the pardon of sin, but through the merits of his cross; there is no life or immortality brought to light, but through his gospel. There is no other saying worthy to be compared with this, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And how shall they who neglect so great salvation, escape the righteous judgment of God?

Permit me, by way of improvement, to apply this subject to three descriptions of *sinners*. And first, to those who deliberately live in wicked courses. You certainly, (should such unhappily be the case of any here present,) you must acknowledge yourselves to be sinners; you certainly are included in the apostle's description of those whom Christ Jesus came into the world to save. We are told that the righteous are scarcely saved; where then shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? To you, surely, this report must be of infinite importance. You cannot possibly hope to be justified by your works, nor expect that, without a Saviour, a righteous God will acquit you in the day of judgment. And you have very great encouragement; you have the word, not only of apostles, but

of Christ himself, that he came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. You then, of all men, will not question the importance of this report. Though you have heard it, perhaps, a hundred times before, it is not the less interesting and worthy of your acceptance. On the contrary, it is daily becoming more important, because the day of grace is continually wasting away. Every fleeting hour shortens the time allowed for your receiving this report, and making your peace with God. The time is drawing near and still nearer, when you will leave this state of trial. And also, should you consider, that by rejecting the counsel of God, and despising his offered mercies, your sins are aggravated, and your condemnation is more to be feared.

And let no sinner despair of mercy, do not fear that one so wicked as yourself, cannot be pardoned and blessed. St. Paul tells you, "Christ came to save sinners of whom I am *chief*." Though he was one of the most wicked, one who was most unworthy of such mercy, yet even he obtained it. Sin in him abounded, but grace did much more abound. The Lord is mighty to forgive: he is rich in mercy; though your sins be as scarlet, by repentance and faith, they shall become white as snow. He whose merciful goodness so bountifully provides for your temporal sustenance, does not neglect your spiritual nature. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" He who while suffering on the cross, prayed for his blaspheming persecutors, and took a penitent thief with him to paradise, will still save those who look to him for

salvation. "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him."

2. But there are other *sinner*s who are comparatively called good men; and who, for that reason, are in danger of trusting in themselves, that they are righteous; men who avoid scandalous vices, and live what we call good moral lives. To such, we say this report is worthy of *your* acceptation. "If you say you have *no sin*, you deceive yourselves, and the truth is not in you." For you a Saviour is no less necessary, that you may be accepted of God, and blessed in heaven, than for the most atrocious sinner. If you are saved, it can only be through the same Lord Jesus Christ. Divine wisdom has appointed his sacrifice and mediation, as the only door, by which men can enter the kingdom of heaven. Though (like the pharisee, who blessed God that he was not as other men,) you have happily avoided scandalous vices, and more heinous sins, are not you guilty before him, in whose sight the heavens are impure? Do you indeed love God with all your heart and soul, and your neighbour as yourself? The vilest sinner who smites upon his breast, and calls for mercy, will be justified, rather than the moralist, who justifies himself. Publicans and harlots will enter the kingdom of heaven, before those who trust in themselves that they are righteous.

3. Christians also are to consider themselves as *sinner*s, though through faith in Christ, they are delivered from the condemnation, and through the sanctification of the Spirit, they are, in some happy degree, preserved from the dominion of sin. St. Paul, who was the best of Christians, was among the

chief of sinners. We do not tell you who are Christians, that this report is worthy of all men to be received; you know it to be a faithful saying, you are sensible of its inestimable worth. I need not tell you of the joy and comfort of that which is already your best consolation. But it is commended to your further notice and attention. It has still new glories to reveal, new comforts to unfold, new joys to impart, of which your knowledge and experience are yet imperfect. It is a treasure unfailing of things new and old. You should read, mark, learn, and inwardly more and more digest them, till you are “able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.” And “unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we are able to ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.”

SERMON III.



CHRIST THE TRUE SACRIFICE.

Heb. x. 8—10.

Above, when he said, Sacrifice, and offering, and burnt-offerings, and offering for sin, thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; (which are offered by the law:) Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

THIS is one of those passages of the holy scriptures, which are of such comparative excellence, as makes them suitable to be selected for the subjects of sermons. The Christian should never forget that “the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” The unbelieving world will view the institutions of Moses, and the various ordinances of the Jewish law, as splendid, but unmeaning institutions, without reason, and without utility. And not unbelievers only, but Christians incline too much to view them as a dead letter, which, being now fulfilled, is less worthy of our attention. Some Christians, to support their favourite systems, find it convenient to degrade the laws of Moses, and say what our 7th article condemns,

“that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises;” that the old dispensation had respect to temporal things only. Such a notion is very erroneous. Though we are no longer under a schoolmaster, we are bound still to profit by his instructions. They who come to Christ, will come most surely in the way in which God would conduct them. Christ came into this world, as himself tells us, not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them. And we who preach his gospel, are authorized to “say none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come;” and to what they testify of him, does Christ send us for a knowledge of his true character. He plans his doctrine on that foundation which God had laid: “Search the scriptures, they testify of me.” Indeed, throughout the New Testament, we are continually sent back to the Old, for a knowledge of Christ and his religion. The old scriptures are the inexhaustible mine containing the true gold; in the New Testament we are taught how to dig the ore and to refine it. The gospel is constantly sending us back to that schoolmaster, that we may with true knowledge come to Christ.

In the text now chosen, is a remarkable example. What is written in the 40th Psalm, you are here taught, has regard to Jesus Christ; that all the sacrifices and other offerings under the law, God would not accept; they were insufficient to make expiation for sin. Then it was, or because no other offering could suffice, that the Son of God offered himself as a Mediator. By taking a human body, he did God’s will; he fulfilled all righteousness, and made an atonement which was accepted.

This text taken in its connection, teaches the grand fundamental doctrine of our religion, that *Christ is the true sacrifice*. And what I now propose, the Lord permitting, to say upon it, may conveniently be arranged under three distinct heads; showing, First, That sacrifice was necessary to put away sin: Secondly, That God would accept no other than that of Christ: And, thirdly, That to him, all the sacrifices under the law had regard. It is a subject you will readily see commended to your attentive consideration, not by its novelty, but by its importance. As some articles of food are deemed necessities of life, and are always required; so some doctrines are essential to religion, and must be often discoursed on, and always kept in view; and none can possibly be more essential than this under present consideration.

I. This first point proposed, that *sacrifice was necessary to put away sin*, is clearly and fully taught throughout the bible. It is not necessary to the purpose of this discourse, that I should cite the passages of the scriptures which confirm it: you know that there are many more such, than one sermon would contain. But, as we might expect, the grand adversary has set himself to oppose this doctrine, and human reason has been raised in arms against it. The right use of our reason would teach us, that if the bible be God's word, it is folly in us to pretend to be wiser than God, or to attempt, by forced construction, to make the scriptures say what we suppose ought to be their meaning. And we might expect too, that common sense would teach every man of common understanding, that if we owe a debt to

divine justice, and *have nothing to pay*, except another will pay it for us, we must suffer the penalty. But whatever men may think of reason or of scripture, facts at least are unyielding, and no ingenuity of man can explain them away. And no fact is more remarkable or undeniable, none more worthy the attention of mankind, than that, before the death of Jesus Christ, bloody sacrifice, or the slaying and offering of innocent beasts for the sins of men, were almost universal in all ages and countries of the world. Now reason and the high importance of the question, require that this fact be accounted for. There is no effect without a cause. How came it that mankind should entertain the hope, or idea, that the blood of beasts should atone for their transgressions; that the death of the innocent should give life to the guilty; that by the shedding of blood, sinners should obtain remission? If this had been the opinion, or the practice of a few individuals only, or of but one or two nations, we might have reckoned it among the unaccountable singularities which sometimes appear in the world. But this practice was universal, and it extends back to the remotest antiquity. It was not the effect of ignorance or barbarism; it was most practised where learning flourished. Those nations which had most advanced in science and the liberal arts, offered the most abundant sacrifices, and seemed most to rely upon them. And what reason are we to assign for this well known fact? There are but two reasons that can be given. One is, that the common sense, or reason of mankind, has directed them to this mode of appeasing the wrath of heaven, of expiating sin, and becoming reconciled to God. But if

this be the true cause, then the *necessity of sacrifice* is a *reasonable* doctrine; it is what the author of our being has implanted in our breasts; it is a part of natural religion. And of course, to reason against it, would be an abuse of reason; it would be opposing a dictate of our common sense.

But perhaps some, and I doubt not but many will be ready to say, that this is not the true cause; that it is unreasonable to suppose, that the blood of beasts can make expiation for sin; that God will not accept our killing his creatures, to whom he has given life, as an atonement for our transgressions. His language is, “I will take no bullock out of thine house, nor he goat out of thy fold, for all the beasts of the forest are mine, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills. Thinkest thou that I will eat bulls’ flesh, and drink the blood of goats?”

But if reason has not taught men the efficacy of sacrifice, it must have been taught by *revelation*. We must, to be reasonable, admit that God has at some time, and in some way made known, that the sins of men may be put away by sacrifice. And with the Christian, there can, I think, be no doubt that this is the truth. Many parts of the religion which the heathen practised, were a corruption of what was at first truth. As it was conveyed by tradition, from one generation to another, “through the corruption that was in them,” they departed more and more from the right way. We have good reason to believe that God taught Adam to offer sacrifice, which his children we are told did. “Cain brought the fruit of the ground, an offering unto the Lord, and Abel brought the firstlings of his flock. The

Lord had respect to Abel and *to his offering*:" the shedding of blood was accepted. The tradition of this revelation descended to all the posterity of Adam, which very easily accounts for the universality of sacrifice.

Thus, if you consider only the fact, that sacrifice was so universal in the world, it is a strong and very striking proof, that it is necessary to put away sin. But, when in addition to this, four other facts are taken into consideration: First, That the institution of sacrifices was the principal and most essential part of the Jewish religion, as recorded in the bible: Secondly, That those sacrifices under the law were so ordered, as to be wonderfully prophetic of the death of Jesus Christ, and his offering for the sins of men: When you consider, thirdly, That Jesus Christ did actually give himself to suffer and die upon the cross expressly for the sins of men, and in fulfilment of what the scriptures had predicted of his sufferings: And, fourthly, (which is not the least wonderful,) That since the death of Christ, other sacrifices, which before were so common and universal, have declined, and almost ceased from the earth; bringing, I say, all these facts into one view, they amount to a moral demonstration, not only that sacrifice is necessary, but also, that all other sacrifice has respect to Jesus Christ.

II. And this will conduct us to our second general head, which is, that *God will accept no other sacrifice* than that of his Son. This is shown in the 40th Psalm, to which our text has reference. David begins it with the mention of God's mercy vouch-

safed, and expresses a hope that “many shall see it and fear, and shall put their trust in the Lord.” A blessing is also pronounced upon those who put their trust in God. He is praised for his wonderful works, and general goodness to mankind, which exceed all that human language can express: “If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” This naturally leads the psalmist to that superlative instance of God’s goodness, which infinitely exceeds all that we can speak or think of, and which the inspired prophets appear to have ever in their view, the redemption of mankind. David is so elated with the subject, that he immediately discontinues all reference to his own private concerns, and speaks in the person of Christ, or rather Christ speaks by him, in words addressed to his heavenly Father: “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire;” they cannot atone for the sins of men; “but mine ears hast thou opened.” These last words have reference to an institution of the law. If an Israelite had a servant of his own nation, or kindred, he was forbid to keep him in subjection more than six years. Yet, if at the expiration of that time, the servant freely chose to continue in that state of servitude, his master was to take an awl “and thrust it through his ear unto the door,” which was a token before the judge that he voluntarily engaged to be a servant for life. Hence, to *open* or bore the ear, became a proverbial expression of voluntary servitude. “Mine ears hast thou opened,” means, thou hast accepted me as thy servant, and received me into thy family. The Saviour continues: “Burnt offering, and sin offering, hast thou not required.” They are unavail-

ing, and it is thy will, O Father, that they should be discontinued, that, at the appointed time, all such sacrifice should cease. "Then, said I, lo I come." A human body hast thou given me for this purpose; I will take of the seed of Abraham; I will be born as an infant, and I will become a sacrifice for sin; I will be slain the innocent for the guilty; on me be laid the iniquity of the whole race. "In the volume of the book it is written of me." In the holy scriptures it is every where prophesied that I should appear in human nature, and put away sin by the sacrifice of myself.

In the 10th chapter to the Hebrews, where the apostle is proving this very point, that no sacrifice but that of Christ, can put away sin, he proves it by this same passage from the 40th Psalm. "The law (he says,) having a *shadow* (only) of good things to come, and not the very image (or reality) of the things, can never, with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect; for then, (if they could put away sin,) would they not have ceased to be offered?" If they were effectual, there would be no need of repeating them. "But (as they are not so,) in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Wherefore, when he (that is Christ,) cometh into the world, he saith, (by the mouth of David, as we have seen in the 40th Psalm,) "Sacrifice, and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou given me;" or as the psalmist expresses it, "Mine ears hast thou opened." The apostle varies the expression, that the sense may be

better understood. A body was given the Saviour, fitted for the purpose of his being the great healing sacrifice; and that body was nailed to the cross, as under the law the servant was nailed to the door. The Saviour was thus accepted as *God's servant* to do his will, as the substitute for sinners. The apostle continues his quotation: "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast no pleasure. Then said I, lo *I come*; in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God." And thus does St. Paul, in the words of our text, comment on the passage: "Above, when he said, Sacrifice, and offering and burnt-offering, and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; (which were offered by the law,) then he (the Saviour,) said, lo I come to do thy will, O God. He (that is God,) taketh away the first;" abolishes the Jewish sacrifices, "that he may establish the second;" that he may constitute his only begotten Son as the true and sufficient sacrifice, as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." "By the which will we are sanctified;" we are accounted a holy people, and accepted as righteous, by God's mercy in Christ, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, (that body which for the purpose was given him,) once for all." Thus does the apostle prove from the 40th Psalm, that no sacrifice, but that of Jesus Christ, can take away sin.

III. We shall find it profitable to attend to what was mentioned as our third head. That to Christ all the various sacrifices under the law, had regard. These are briefly mentioned in the passage which the

apostle quotes from the psalmist. That which is here called *offering*, or as it is better rendered in our old translation, *meat offering*, was “not a sacrifice of any animal; but an oblation consisting of flour, oil, frankincense and salt.” The Jewish sacrifices, or offerings of animals, are included under three heads, or kinds, *sacrifice, burnt-offering, and sin-offering*. On some solemn occasions they were all offered in the following order: first was presented the offering for sin. He who offered it, laid his hand upon the victim, which was then slain beside the altar, and the fat was burnt upon it; but the body “was burnt without the camp,” being considered impure and defiled, by the sins which it bore.

“Next the worshippers brought their *burnt-offering*, as they had done the other, laying their hands upon its head, and presenting it to God. The blood was sprinkled upon the altar, and all the flesh was consumed upon it. No part of it was eaten by any one. It was an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto God. Of this kind were the two lambs, which were daily offered for a morning and evening sacrifice. Such, probably, were the sacrifices offered by the patriarchs. Such a one, Abraham was commanded, and for three days expected to make of his son Isaac, from which fate he was delivered by an angel, and a ram was provided for a burnt-offering in his stead.

“The third class were called *peace-offerings*, of which a part was first given to the altar; a part to those who ministered, and the rest belonged to the worshippers.

“On first approaching with their *offerings for sin*, they appeared as sinful creatures, at enmity with God; yet repenting, acknowledging themselves deserving of punishment, and submitting by substitution to its infliction.

“The burnt-offering, which came next, was a tribute to their heavenly King; an acknowledgment of their allegiance, a renewal of their loyalty, which was supposed to restore them to the state of faithful subjects, under God’s government and protection.

“Lastly, having presented their sacrifice of peace-offerings, they became, as it were, the friends of God, and members of his family; feasting of the same meat, and guests at one common table with the priests who offered, and with the Lord whom they adored.”* In the scriptures before us, we are taught that all these various sacrifices were accomplished, they were realized and fulfilled in the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Other *sacrifice*, and *burnt-offering*, and *offering for sin*, God would not accept, but merely as symbols of him, who supplied them all; who, “having made one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down at the right hand of God.” For

First, he is our *offering for sin*. “Whilst we were *yet sinners*, he died for us.” “All we as sheep have gone astray; and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.” The penitent believer humbly acknowledges his sins, and he sees the penalty

* Ogden.

of them fall upon his Saviour. Christ is most frequently represented as our *sin-offering*; as suffering for our guilt, because this is the foundation of the others, of all we have or hope for. In this especially did "God commend his love to us." "The bodies of those beasts," says the apostle, "whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest, are *burnt without the camp*. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, *suffered without the gate*;" that is, on Mount Calvary, which was not included within the walls of Jerusalem. Thus does every part harmonize.

Christ is no less truly our "*burnt-offering*," or sacrifice of "a sweet smelling savour." He is "the Lord our righteousness." The shedding of his blood has not only shielded us from punishment, but brought us, who were afar off, near to God. "Through him we have access unto the Father." Yes, we who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, are made nigh by the blood of Christ;" we are accepted in the beloved; our hearts are renewed and sanctified; we are created again unto good works.

And thus he regularly becomes also our *peace-offering*; for "*he is our peace* who hath made Jew and Gentile one," "that he might reconcile both unto God, in one body by the cross." Through Christ, though unworthy to be servants, we are received as children, joint heirs with Christ, and may with him call God "our Father." We have "the peace of God which passeth understanding;" we can partake at the altar, sit at the Lord's table, and commune

with his saints. We can eat of that Lamb which was slain for the sins of men, from the foundation of the world. His own words are, "Take, eat, this is my body which was given for you." He likewise said, "This cup is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you; drink it in remembrance of me." "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." For "who can lay any thing to the charge of God's elect;" and who, or what can separate us from the love of Christ? His dying bequest is, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you." And thus do we see, that by his "one sacrifice for sins," he is made for us righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; he is our *sin-offering*, our *burnt-offering*, and our *peace-offering*. He has borne our sins; he has reconciled us to God, and "has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." We are pardoned; we are justified, and we enjoy all the hopes, and comforts, and privileges of righteous men; we are restored to the full liberty of God's children; we may have communion with saints, with Christ, and with God. By this "one sacrifice of himself once offered," "all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

What manner of men then ought we to be? What doth the Lord require of us, that we may be partakers of these immense benefits and make a suitable return for his goodness? We are required to take the cup of salvation so mercifully presented to us; to have

repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. We must believe that this same Jesus, whom wicked men crucified, is both Lord and Christ; he is both priest and sacrifice; he is “the way, and the truth, and the life.” In vain should we come before the Lord in our own strength, or our own righteousness. In vain should we come before him with burnt-offerings, or calves of a year old. The Lord will not be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil. Should you give your first-born for your transgressions, the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul, it would not make atonement for your transgression, nor wash away your sin. The Lord has shown you what is truly good; he has accepted on your behalf a meritorious sacrifice; and of you he requires, that you do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. If Christ is your *sin-offering*, take heed that you do not, by sinning, crucify him afresh. Detest what is unrighteous; bring forth fruits meet for repentance; do justly, or in his own words, do to others as you would have them do to you.

If Christ be your *burnt-offering*, if he be a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour, fulfilling all righteousness on your behalf, and if through him you are restored to God’s favour, surely you will love mercy; to do good and to communicate you will not forget, nor will you be weary in well doing. This is a sacrifice with which God is well pleased, provided, as you are taught, that it is all burnt upon the altar. Those religious works, which in the scriptures are called good, are those which are wrought through faith; which are done, not from worldly views, but to

honour God. Let your alms and all your deeds of mercy, be lent unto the Lord, by which you may “lay up for yourself a good foundation against the time to come, that you may lay hold on eternal life.” And is Christ also our *peace-offering*? “Are we now brought near to God?” And to effect it, did he shed his own blood upon the cross? Then let our songs be exalted with praise and adoration of God, for this most affecting “assurance of his favour and goodness towards us, and that we are indeed members incorporate in the mystical body of his Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people.” If he who was in the form of God, left his celestial throne, and made himself of no reputation, taking not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham, and suffering for us men and for our salvation, a painful, shameful death, shall we not *walk humbly with God*? Daily, and most devoutly upon our knees, let us beseech him to pardon our sins; to sanctify our hearts, and guide our steps in his righteous ways. Let us adore him for his manifold gifts of grace, and for the whole work of redemption, and chiefly for the peace we have through Jesus Christ. With humble and thankful submission faithfully endeavour in all things to obey his laws, and live to his glory. Learn of Him who is lowly and meek; take his yoke upon you, and be duly grateful, that his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

And to Him who bled upon the cross, to save our souls; to the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, be rendered obedience and eternal praise. Amen.

SERMON IV.



THE CAUSE AND CONDEMNATION OF UNBELIEF.

John iii. 19.

This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

NOTHING is more obvious than the fact which an apostle mentions, that "all have not faith;" that of those who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, many do not believe or receive it. But respecting the cause of this unbelief, there are various opinions. Some ascribe it to a deficiency in the evidence of revealed truth, others to some defect in the discernment of men. And others still there are who would cut the knot which they cannot untie, declaring that the gospel is hid from some by the sovereign will and decree of God; that he never intended, nor is it his purpose "that all should come to the knowledge of the truth." Our blessed Saviour has been pleased to assign a cause of unbelief, which, however it may differ from the opinions of men, will be found, on due inquiry, to be in most cases the true reason; "Men love darkness rather than light, *because their deeds are evil.*"

This very important declaration is found in his memorable discourse with Nicodemus. Having shown that "ruler of the Jews," the nature and necessity of a *new birth*, he was pleased also to instruct him in what are eminently "heavenly things;" the great evangelical doctrines of salvation and eternal life through faith in the Son of God. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," to heal the wounded Israelites, "even so," he says, "must the Son of man be lifted up," for the healing of the nations. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And "greater love than this," we may well believe, never was, or can be revealed to men or angels. "He that believeth on him is not condemned." By thus looking with the eye of faith, to this divine Saviour raised upon the cross, the sinner shall be healed of his spiritual maladies. "But he that believeth not is condemned already;" he is in a state of condemnation, because in a state of sin; as the wounded Israelite, who refused to look at the brazen serpent, was already poisoned and perishing. Rejecting God's offered mercy is still more offensive than violating his laws; his sin who does it, becomes exceeding sinful; "because," as our Lord continues, "he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God;" he is guilty of despising the most gracious offers of eternal life. Justly, therefore, is it said, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

In this text are included four propositions, all of them highly interesting and important. The first is, "*That light is come into the world.*" The second, That "*men loved darkness rather than light.*" He then, thirdly, gives the reason of this strange preference; "*Because their deeds are evil.*" And fourthly, declares the guilt of it; "*This is the condemnation.*"

I. The first of these positions, *that light is come into the world*; that since, if not in consequence of the advent of Christ and the preaching of his gospel, mankind have more and better knowledge of religious things, none we might suppose will pretend to deny. Our Lord evidently speaks of spiritual light; of the knowledge of God, and life eternal. Different people may ascribe it to various causes, and human pride will of course arrogate the glory to itself; but the fact is evident, that the gospel of Jesus Christ has in a wonderful degree brought light into the world. When this Sun of Righteousness rose upon the world, mankind were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death; the earth was overspread with idolatry, gross superstition, and absurd and impious doctrines. Moral virtue was taught by a few philosophers, but was little understood, and less practised by the people. Of the divine Being and a future state, they had no correct ideas, nor adequate conceptions. Even the few wise men of the Pagan world, who professed to "know God, glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to

be wise, they (even the philosophers,) became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." The belief of a future state was very obscure, and little understood by the common people, and was rendered more doubtful by the disputations of the learned. Then it was, when, in the language of Isaiah, "darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people," that the Lord rose upon the earth and "brought life and immortality to light." He made known the true state and character of fallen man, and the only way of salvation; and in his gospel, the holiness and providence, and all the perfections of God, are clearly taught and shown. It cannot be necessary to dwell on this point; no one, we may well believe, who compares the present state of religious knowledge with what it was before Christ appeared on earth, will hesitate to acknowledge, that *light has come into the world*. In Christian countries religious knowledge is not confined to any class of people, but diffused throughout every grade; and Christians generally have a better understanding of the spiritual state of man, the moral attributes of God, and the duty we owe him, than had the wisest sages of the Pagan world. The Saviour of the world gives the information which the world needs, and which the reason of man could never find; he solves many difficulties which before he taught, were inexplicable, and he places beyond all doubt or uncertainty, the great question of a future state.

II. But can it be also true, which our Lord here further declares, that *men loved darkness rather than light*? Does not this seem to contradict our general experience and what we know to be the fact? Mankind are very inquisitive, and have an insatiable thirst after knowledge. Schools, and colleges, and seminaries of learning, fill the civilized world. Books and other writings are published in such numbers, that the world can scarce contain them. Curiosity pries into the deepest arcana of nature, and no way to science is left unexplored. What was said of the Athenians is generally true of all men, they are continually seeking after some new thing. Can it then be truly said, that “men love darkness rather than light?” This is said from the lips of truth itself; but it is said of spiritual knowledge; of the light which will make men wise unto salvation. The children of this world are wise in their generation, and they diligently seek after worldly wisdom; but with all their seeking, “one thing is needful.” There is a natural and almost universal disinclination to hear and receive religious truths. Very many of the things most eagerly sought for, are empty, trivial, and vain. Senseless parade and idle conversation, without instruction or use; books of fictitious tales and fantastic descriptions, which, far from enlightening, tend rather to darken the mind, and the more we read them, the less we know; various kinds of pleasures and amusements, worse than unprofitable, are among the things most captivating to the mind. But we see nothing of the like general eagerness to obtain religious knowledge and the wisdom which is from above. Though this is infinitely more important, it is attended to with

reluctance by a great, I fear we must say, by much the greater part of mankind. They to whom a sermon, or a chapter of the bible, would be an irksome, heavy task, rejoice to spend their days and nights in reading and hearing things which are of very little, if of any use, and which tend to darken the light which is within them.

But we need not dwell on this greater love of things of less importance; we need not insist on the numberless objects of worldly pursuit which unnecessarily supersede religious researches, and are almost sure to blind the eyes of men, or divert their attention at least from religious truth: there are cases of those who directly oppose the gospel, enough and more than enough, to verify this declaration, that men love darkness rather than light. For, consider only what frivolous and endless objections are continually raised and urged against this light which has come into the world; what perplexing difficulties are artfully proposed; what contempt and ridicule are daily cast upon the holy scriptures, and the awful truths which they contain! Can any one doubt that there is in the natural heart the seeds of enmity against the things which are of God? Nothing is more evident, than that the religion of Jesus Christ is positively offensive to mankind. We have seen, none indeed can be ignorant that light has come into the world. Let men boast as they will, of the light of nature and the powers of human reason, it is as evident as light itself, that there is no pure and certain religious knowledge in the world, but that which shines from the scriptures of divine revelation. Many there are, who, to exalt their reason against its adorable author, would first

plunder the bible of what suits their purpose, and then burn the book to conceal the theft. They would rob God's altar to decorate the idols set up against him, and place his ark in the temple of Dagon. If reason be so all-sufficient in spiritual things, why has reason been inactive or unfruitful for so many hundreds and thousands of years? When it made such progress in other things, why respecting God and a future state, did it suffer the world to lie in darkness, and sanction such gross and abominable absurdities? If reason and human learning have such mighty powers, why (immediately after the Augustan age, and when the fame and glory of the learned filled the world, why) or how could a few plain, unlettered men be the first and only effectual instruments of diffusing this light throughout the world? Where were the wise; where the scribes; where the disputers of this world? If reason has brought this light into the world, why do we see it where the gospel is preached, and see it no where besides? Certainly this light is from God; and even in their denial of its true source, and by ascribing it to human intellect, men manifest a love of darkness, a dislike to the pure heavenly light. If they cannot wholly oppose, they would yet obscure and so render it ineffectual as to its gracious purpose. How many able writers have exhausted the resources of wit and learning, of reason and of sophistry, to discredit the doctrines of a crucified Saviour! And many writers without such abilities, have done scarce less injury to religion, by their impious scoffs and daring blasphemies. Consider what greater numbers attempt the same in conversation, and more still there are, whose life and

conduct too plainly evince the repugnance of their hearts to the doctrines of Christ; that the morality of his gospel is displeasing, and that they are unwilling to be convinced by its evidence or reformed by its precepts. Consider these things and no doubt can remain; but generally speaking, and in regard to the knowledge of Christ, men love darkness rather than light.

III. Our Saviour has also given the reason that men will make so unwise and strange a choice; it is *because their deeds are evil*; it is owing, he declares, to the depravity and wickedness of the heart; because men naturally incline to the pride and love of the world and pursuit of sinful vanities, which, in the language of scripture, are enmity against God, and repugnant to the truth of his word. The heart, while in love with sin, can never be reconciled to the doctrines of the cross; a mind defiled by iniquity, till humbled by repentance, will be averse from the light which exposes its vileness and deformity. And accordingly, as our Lord continues, “Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” The word of God is sharper than a two edged sword; it pierces the heart; it disturbs the sleeping conscience; and there is no sleeper less willing to be disturbed; it allows no rest or peace to those who live in sin. We all know how natural it is to dread and shrink from that which will give immediate pain. Often, at the risk of life, we suffer the wound to mortify, or the

distemper to undermine the constitution, rather than feel the operator's hand, or endure the pains of medical relief; and still more naturally do men resort to every expedient to justify themselves, rather than feel and acknowledge with unfeigned sincerity, that there is no health in them, rather than endure the reproach of Christ, or the pain of repentance. And we know too, (what very much confirms this our Lord's declaration,) that when men do repent, when they are indeed awakened to a sense of their sins, and their minds are humbled with conscious guilt, they with all readiness and joy do come to the light; they readily receive the doctrines of Christ. The great obstacle is now removed; they hunger and thirst after righteousness; they now have eyes to see and ears to hear. Now (to the penitent) the yoke of Christ is easy, and his burden light; his doctrines are clear to their view, and refreshing to their soul. Now with grateful hearts they are ready to acknowledge, "Thy word is a lantern to my feet, and a light to my paths." "How sweet are thy words to my taste; yea sweeter than honey to my mouth."

Men, as we might expect, are ready to excuse their neglect of religion, and their opposition to the gospel, by questioning the evidence of its truth. But do such people, generally speaking, consider well what evidence there is to authenticate the religion of Christ? Of all people, they are generally the least acquainted with that cloud of witnesses which the Lord has given to convince our understanding, and that our faith may be reasonable as it is religious. But allow that the evidence is deficient, can this be a reason for loving darkness? Can this be the cause why men oppose and

reject the light? If men loved light rather than darkness, they would, most certainly, wish that the gospel were true. The very tidings or report that God, even the Omnipotent Ruler of the Universe, has been so astonishingly gracious as to send his only Son into the world, not to condemn, as it deserved, but for the merciful purpose of saving it, would, we might expect, very much awaken the attention of mankind. What light is given, we might expect would very joyfully be received; if difficulties occurred, men would endeavour, not to magnify, but to remove them; and if some things were yet obscure and doubtful, they would be content to "know in part." We might expect certainly that men would delight in a religion which gives such pure and sublime ideas of the Deity; which is calculated, and evidently tends to produce peace and happiness on earth, and to confer invaluable blessings upon mankind. But the fact is just the reverse of this. They prefer darkness, and evidently because they dislike the holiness which the gospel requires, or in other words, "because their deeds are evil."

Another excuse which men give for rejecting the gospel revelation, is its mysteries and uncertainty. Every thing is not revealed which they claim a right to know; every objection which has been made, has not, to their satisfaction, been obviated. But do men reason thus and conduct so in other things? The works of nature are no less mysterious than the doctrines of grace. Do men ever refuse their daily food, because they cannot understand by what wonderful process it can strengthen and support their bodies? We never see men neglect to till the ground,

and plant their seeds, because God has not yet revealed to their understanding the mysteries of vegetation. It is also a fact, that uncertainty of success does not deter men from pursuing the things of this world. They plant and water, without knowing that they shall have increase; they heap up riches while still ignorant who shall gather or enjoy them. Many things they eagerly pursue, when the probability of success is much against them. Yes, for the things of this world all are ready to run, though but few can gain the prize. And is the salvation of our souls, is eternal life the only good thing not worth pursuing till all possibility of failure is removed? No; this example of uncertainty is but a pretext; it is not the true cause of their not loving light; it is as the scriptures declare, from an evil heart of unbelief, that men depart from the living God. The head is sick, the heart faint, spiritual health is not in them. Were the hope of obtaining such blessedness as the gospel offers, but one to ten, or but one to a hundred or a thousand; yet if men acted with the same wisdom and consistency as in other things, they would omit no possible means of obtaining it. When a man is sick, he calls a physician, and gladly submits to painful operations, though scarce any hope of life remains. For a high prize, a thousand will contend, though they all know that one only can obtain it. And do not men use the utmost vigilance and precaution in avoiding temporal evils? No one would needlessly enter an infected house or city, though the probability of his taking the disorder were but small. And yet men will venture to reject the gospel of Christ, and to live without God in the world, be-

cause they are not sure and certain that heaven may be attained! They will risk their immortal welfare, they will live on in the awful peril of eternal perdition, presuming that God will be found a liar; that the gospel may not be true. Is this wisdom? Is it reasonable? Is it consistent with common prudence? Would men do this, would they think so lightly of immortal life, would they live so fearless of a judgment day, if their heart were not blinded by sin, if they did not dread the light? Certainly if there be any reason to believe; if there be but a remote probability that the scriptures were "given by inspiration of God;" that Jesus Christ was a wise and good man, and that his apostles taught the truth; reason and prudence teach us that the subject demands our most awakened concern. Unless you are sure that the religion of Christ is a cunningly devised fable; unless you are convinced beyond a doubt, that there is no heaven to be lost, nor hell to be feared, to neglect this great salvation, is the very greatest folly.

Should there be some, and I doubt not but there are many, and some of them perhaps here present, who, though not yet confirmed Christians, are sincerely inquiring for the truth, and would gladly be enlightened in the way of salvation; them we only exhort to continue, to persevere, and be not discouraged. Continue to ask, and you shall receive; knock in the way which the Lord has appointed, and in due time it shall be opened unto you. But you ought carefully to examine whether the difficulties you meet with, and the darkness which still surrounds you, be not the effect of an evil heart. Perhaps in our Lord's language, *the light within you is darkness.*

Some prejudice may mislead your judgment; self-sufficiency may shut out the light of divine truth, or you may be too tenacious of opinions inconsistent with the doctrines of Christ. It may be, that in searching for the truth you are not constant and regular, or you do it without suitable humility and sense of your dependence. And what is still more to be feared is, that you do not walk by that light which is already given you. "To him that hath shall be given."

The scriptures indeed assign many causes for infidelity; such as pride, self-righteousness, love of the world, carelessness, and vain-glory; but as these spring from an evil heart, they are included in the one cause which our Lord has here assigned; and this, the more you examine, the more will you find it the chief obstacle in the way of our becoming true believers and pious Christians.

IV. And will not this result convince us, that *this is the condemnation?* That our rejection of the gospel, that our opposition to God's mercy and grace, is itself a sin most offensive to God? The substance indeed of what we are commissioned to preach is, that believers shall be saved, and that "he that believeth not shall be condemned." And the view which we have now taken of the subject, shows the justice of this condemnation. If sin be the cause of unbelief, the justice of its condemnation cannot be denied.

It behooves us all then to examine and consider well, whether in our Lord's language, we are not "condemned already," in the nature of our opposition to the gospel, or at least in neglecting so great

salvation. The author of our salvation gives to individuals, the light both of reason and of revelation, in different portions and degrees, which renders this life more fully probationary. But light is offered to all, and all are accountable for what is given. But no degree of light will satisfy those who have not eyes to see. The gospel will be hid to those whose eyes the god of this world has blinded. There was one who thought sinners would repent, if one went unto them from the dead. Others said that they would believe in Christ, if he would come down from the cross. In their sense of the word, probably they would have believed; "the devils believe," being confounded with evidence. But we are required to believe in a Saviour who continued on the cross till he died. The Jews had Moses and the prophets, and saw the miracles of Christ. Would not you be satisfied with what they saw? The sick healed; the blind restored to sight; the deaf to hearing, and the dead to life? But they still required a sign; they were "not persuaded though one did rise from the dead." Consider then, how much light has been our blessed portion, and how great must be the sin, and how just the condemnation of preferring darkness. It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for us, who, amidst such light, continue in sin. Thousands and millions now on this earth, would rejoice and bless God for the religious privileges which we enjoy; while we are raising objections, or making excuses, they would be on their knees, adoring the Lord God of their salvation. What we chiefly need is not more light, but to remove the sins which conceal it from our view. We know

from experience and observation, that when this is done, when men truly repent, they readily receive and rejoice in the Saviour's light. And the whole improvement may be briefly comprehended in the prophet's words, "Cease to do evil, learn to do well." To those who order their conversation aright, the Lord has promised to show his salvation. "If a man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

That this knowledge may be our blessed portion, the Lord mercifully grant through Jesus Christ.

SERMON V.



THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ESTABLISHES THE LAW OF GOD.

Romans iii. 31.

*Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea,
we establish the law.*

ONE of the greatest obstacles which a preacher of the gospel has to contend with, is the prejudice that prevails against that method of salvation which it proposes. That men should be justified or accepted as righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, and not for their own righteousness, is opposed to our natural pride, and some think it inconsistent with reason and good morals. Hence it is a common objection against this doctrine of the cross, that it *makes void the law through faith*; that by teaching that men will be justified by faith, without the deeds of the law, we release them from their obligation to keep God's commandments, and render his law but a dead letter. This objection we find is as old as Christianity. The apostles were opposed with this pretended difficulty.

In this epistle to the Romans St. Paul explains and defends the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and obviates

the objections made by Jews and others. This doctrine, he observes in this chapter, had been censured and (as is often the case of those who are censured) it was misrepresented. With those who have ears to hear, what is chiefly necessary to the receiving of this doctrine, is to understand it. What then, let us inquire, does the apostle teach? After reasoning upon the subject through three chapters, he comes to the conclusion in our text, "Do we then make void the law through faith?" After considering what I have said, will any one still urge this groundless objection? Do you conceive that we preach an unholy doctrine, and teach that men may "do evil that good may come?" Do we allow men to "continue in sin that grace may abound?" Do we justify or any way countenance disobedience to the laws of God? "God forbid:" we view such doctrine with abhorrence: we will have God true, though all men are liars. Indeed the fact is the reverse: "yea, we establish the law." The doctrine of justification by faith, which we preach, confirms the authority of God's laws; it exposes the sinfulness and peril of violating any, even the least of his commandments.

Such is the apostle's statement or affirmation in this text. In discoursing farther on the subject, three things will naturally present themselves for consideration. First, What it is that we teach respecting justification by faith. Secondly, How or in what respects it establishes the law. And, lastly, The true inference implied indeed in the text, that they who oppose this doctrine make void the law.

I. In discoursing on the first of these heads, it will not be necessary to consume much of our time in explaining the word faith. It will be sufficient to observe, that the apostle does not here speak of faith abstractedly, or the mere belief of what the scriptures teach. He speaks of the *doctrine of faith*, or the gospel plan of salvation, as it stands opposed to a hope of eternal life for our own merits. He speaks of it as a principle of justification or ground of a Christian's hope, and is not defining the term, or telling you precisely what is included in a religious belief; he is proving, as he does clearly prove, that no man can be justified for his own good works and righteous conduct; that all mankind have so sinned as to come short of that perfection of virtue or goodness, which would be necessary to acquit them before God's tribunal; that our hopes of pardon and life eternal must stand entirely upon another foundation, that is, upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He does not, therefore, exclude any thing which the gospel requires from being necessary to our salvation; not repentance, for instance, nor prayer, nor holy living, nor a good heart, inclined to love God and do good to man. He only shows that we have no goodness which will justify us or give us a *claim* to heaven and happiness. He does not deny that salvation is promised to those only who repent, believe, and obey the gospel. He shows simply that whatever we do, though it may be the condition of our acceptance, is not the ground of our hope. Our obedience to the gospel and possession of Christian virtues, are evidence of our faith and acceptance with God; they are the fruit of that faith by which we are justified.

Our loving the brethren is an assurance that we have “passed from death unto life.” “Good works spring necessarily out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by its fruit.” The works of a Christian are wrought through faith, and of course he “shows his faith by his works;” by his religious performances he manifests that his trust is in Christ’s merits, and not in his own.

And it is evident that to be rational and consistent, our hope must rest on the one principle or the other. We must confide either in our own merits, or in the righteousness of our Redeemer. To trust in part to our own goodness and partly in him, is as absurd as it is unscriptural. If Christ be a Saviour, he is not one in part, or in some imperfect degree; he is a Saviour complete, and the glory is all his own. He is separate from sinners. In the work he wrought, we could do nothing. “With his own right hand, and with his holy arm, hath he gotten himself the victory.”

By “*the law*,” we mean the moral law which God has commanded, and man is bound perfectly to obey. The language of the law is on the one hand, “This do and thou shalt live:” “The man that doeth these things shall live by them.” On the other hand the law declares, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” And such a law, it is evident, cannot justify sinners; for if they could be justified by their obedience to the law, they would not be sinners. But as the scriptures teach, all men are concluded under sin, and in God’s sight accounted

transgressors of the law. "Therefore," (as in the 20th verse of this chapter, the apostle justly concludes,) "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." No one has been so perfectly good and obedient, that for his own doings he shall be accounted righteous.

But though all are sinners, and as such are condemned, believers in Christ are, through God's mercy, delivered from the curse, and released from the penalty of the law. "Christ," (saith the apostle to the Galatians,) "hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." And again, to the Corinthians, "God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "Now, therefore, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus;" "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through him." And this he has done, not by making void the law, but by satisfying its demands. The law remains in its full force, as holy and just and rigorous as it ever was. Indeed, we who live under the gospel light, are more guilty when we transgress; and sin with us is exceeding sinful. "It would be better for us not to know the way of righteousness, than to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us." But Jesus Christ has opened a way by which we may escape from the penalty of sin, and appear in the robe of righteousness before our Judge.

In order to this he requires of us repentance and good living; yet the righteousness of our obedience to the gospel is not the principle on which we are

justified; for then we should be justified on two principles, which is absurd; then we should have ground of boasting, which is excluded by the law of faith; then we should “fall from grace,” and virtually relinquish our hope in Christ. We must repent and obey the gospel, because such is the will of God respecting our salvation; because this will promote his glory; because sin is inconsistent with the holiness of God and the happiness of his creatures; and is totally repugnant to that faith into which we were baptized, and by which we are saved: “for how shall we who are dead to sin, (consistently) live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? We are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” We are to maintain good works, but not to trust in them as being meritorious. We are to work out our salvation, but to hope only in our Saviour. And the more we work, the more we “strive to enter in at the straight gate,” the more shall we be convinced that we need a Saviour.

II. We proceed then, secondly, to inquire how, or in what respect, this doctrine of justification by faith establishes the law. And it will appear that every way we acknowledge and confirm its authority and its justice. For if

First, we consider the law in regard to its authority, or its right to demand of us obedience, it will appear that this doctrine of the cross establishes the law. The believer in Christ more than any other,

and in the highest and fullest sense, acknowledges the power and authority of Almighty God. We who embrace this doctrine of the cross, acknowledge God as the creator and preserver of all things; as the Universal Parent, who has absolute right and authority over all creatures as wholly his; that his laws are of indispensable obligation; and that not one jot or tittle can, or will pass away, till all are fulfilled. We believe and teach that it is only in and through the perfect obedience of Christ as our second Adam, men can obtain pardon and acceptance. We maintain that God has a right to exact, and that man is bound to render perfect and entire obedience, and that nothing but the meritorious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, can release us from the penalty annexed to any, the least transgression. And so far are we from teaching or supposing that the redemption of Christ releases us from the obligation of the law, or relaxes its rigour or authority, that on the contrary we hold and maintain, that our obligations to obedience, are increased by the redemption of Christ and the light which we have from his gospel. We better know the vileness and evil effects of sin, and the wickedness of men is still less to be excused. The true believer knows and feels that he is under as great, and if possible, greater obligations, "to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world," than if his eternal welfare depended solely upon the merits and perfection of his own works.

And this, we may add, is true not only in theory or doctrine, but it is confirmed by the testimony of the believer's life. We pretend to no perfection; we are sensible that some "hold the truth in unrighteous-

ness;" that many walk unworthily of their vocation. But they are exceptions which do not materially affect what we generally affirm. Look at the lives and conduct of Christians, and it will be seen that generally they who cordially receive "the faith of Christ crucified," and look for salvation through him alone, do, the most of any men, manifest a deep sense of God's authority as a lawgiver, and of their own sinfulness in violating his laws. No people appear to desire more sincerely than they "to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God;" to obey every precept, moral and religious, which he has enjoined upon mankind. If, therefore, any doctrine does or can establish the *authority* of the law, it is this gospel doctrine of justification by faith; if any one confirms its coercive power, it is the believer.

2. And it will appear also that we do not, through faith, make void the justice of the law; but rather, in this respect also, we establish the law. For we acknowledge and teach and maintain, that all the laws and commandments of God are done in wisdom and truth; that they are just and righteous and holy and good; that we are bound to obey and keep them, not only for the authority of God who ordains them, but for their own intrinsic excellence, equity and truth; they are perfectly adapted and every way tend to the peace and happiness and best good of his creatures. The believer feels and acknowledges from his heart, that he is justly condemned as a sinner; that every transgressor is guilty before God, and that in punishing the wicked, he is perfectly righteous. Our only hope of escaping the righteous judgments of God and of obtaining life eternal, is through the sacrifice of

that Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. We know and feel, that without this satisfaction made to the law, we should be in our sins, and the wrath of God would justly remain upon us. Even repentance, without faith, would lead to despair. Like the fallen spirits, whose day of grace is closed, the more we believed in the one God, the more should we tremble in expectation of his vengeance.

It is evident then that the doctrine of salvation by faith, establishes the law. It every way confirms its authority and its justice. It acknowledges and maintains God's right to command obedience, and his equity in condemning the sinner.

III. It follows then as an inference, and is implied in the text, that they who oppose this doctrine of justification by faith, *make void the law*. It may, perhaps, surprise some to hear it said, that they who profess to be advocates for the law, are the very people who really subvert its authority: and yet this fairly follows from what has already been shown. If maintaining the doctrines of Christ crucified, establishes the law, opposing those doctrines must of course make it void. And this, on examination, will more evidently appear.

And for this purpose, consider first, the authority of the law. Suppose that a man expects to be justified by his own works; that God will accept him without atonement, without any mediator, without any satisfaction to divine justice. And suppose the most favourably that we can, that he sincerely endeavours to do well, "to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men." Does he, with all

his efforts, does any man truly live without sin? Is he perfectly righteous? So much the contrary of this, that his best deeds partake of imperfection, and “without faith, have in them the nature of sin.” In many things we all offend, and in all things the best of us come short of that purity of motive and integrity of conduct, which the perfect law of God requires. St. Paul endeavoured to have a conscience void of offence, and no one ever better succeeded than he. And what merits did he ascribe to his performances? Not any. On the contrary, he considered his righteousness and all his best deeds in regard to merit, as worse than worthless; as rags, as loss, that he might win Christ and be found in him. “Not,” he says, “having mine own righteousness, which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” What then must we conclude of the man who trusts in himself that he is righteous? Is it possible that he realizes God’s sovereign authority over all his creatures, or the strictness of his commandments? Does he view the divine law in its rigour and purity? It cannot be; he must have lax and inadequate conceptions of God as a lawgiver. He must suppose it unnecessary to obey God strictly and in all things; that the Lord will eventually prove to be a lax legislator, who does not exact what his laws require; but permits them to be violated with impunity. And what is this but making void the law, and sapping the foundation of its authority? If we may presume so far, if we may trust that though we daily depart from the strictness of God’s laws, he will account us righteous, why may we not go all lengths, disobey God wholly, and set his

authority at defiance? If one commandment may be violated, without our being punished, why not every one? If it be unnecessary to obey God in all things, why is it necessary to obey him in any thing?

And look again at the justice of the law. Do not they who reject the doctrine of justification by faith, make void its condemning power? If they expect to be justified wholly or in part for their own righteousness, they cannot feel themselves justly condemned. He virtually denies the justice of the law, who justifies himself. He looks for approbation and acceptance in that for which the law condemns him. He controverts the equity of God's commands, and claims more wisdom than the Almighty; he in effect disputes God's executive authority, and rejects the sentence of his tribunal.

But some perhaps will say, "This is not exactly our doctrine; we believe that men are, as the scriptures teach, sinners. But we believe also, that if we repent, God will forgive our sins, and we shall be justified." And on what principle will God forgive the sins of the penitent? How is it that they who have wickedly transgressed the righteous laws of God, can afterwards be justified and accounted righteous? Suppose before a human tribunal, a man is arraigned for murder; he acknowledges the fact, and expresses and feels sincere contrition for having perpetrated such a crime. Would any judge, or could he truly declare, that the criminal, in consequence of his penitence, is not guilty? Would the court acquit and justify him, and declare him a righteous man? Such acquittal would, by all men, be deemed illegal and absurd. And is it more just or rational to maintain,

that after we have sinned against God, after we have wickedly violated his righteous statutes, any thing that we can do will render us innocent and guiltless? Because we are sensible of having sinned, are we, therefore, not sinners? Suppose all that is possible, and more than was ever done by any penitent, that you so perfectly reform your life, as, in the time to come, to live without sin; can this atone for what is past? You may as well say that a debtor, because he contracts no new debts, has paid the old ones. When the laws of God have been violated, eternal, unchanging justice, even the truth of God, requires that the penalty be exacted. But if you hold that God will turn out to be a lax lawgiver; that the declarations of his word will not be strictly verified; that he will fail to execute what his laws denounce, is not this to make void the law? This notion that repentance will in itself put away our sins, and, without any sacrifice, or any Saviour, reconcile us to God, is self-righteousness in disguise; it is virtually claiming to ourselves the honour of our salvation. It is not a little remarkable, though nothing more or less than we might expect, that, generally speaking, and so far as we can with propriety judge, those people who ascribe so much to repentance, manifest themselves as little of penitence and deep contrition, as any class of people that can be named. Let a man truly repent, let him be indeed awakened to a sense of his guilt, and know and feel that he is a sinner, and he will renounce all confidence in himself; he will no longer name his own righteousness; he will now feel the need of a Saviour. His language will be, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this

death?" And most cordially will he "thank God," when he finds that we have such deliverance "through Jesus Christ our Lord." And it has been observed too, and from the same weakness of our nature it might be expected, that they who think that they shall be saved by their own works, are not so "careful to maintain good works;" they are not so strict and scrupulous in their moral conduct, as others who believe the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith. It is evident that any doctrine which makes the cross of Christ of no effect; which denies or explains away his sacrifice for sin, and satisfaction to divine justice for our transgressions, makes void the law. If sinners may be saved without a priest, without a sacrifice, without a Saviour, or any atonement, where is the truth, where the justice, or where the authority of God? Man may violate his laws, and yet without any satisfaction to his justice, escape the penalty of their transgressions. "If I be a Father," he asks, "where is mine honour?" And we may add, if he be a lawgiver, where the obedience and respect due to him in that character?

And thus does it appear that they who would be thought the advocates of the law, may be in reality its opposers, and in their attempts to defend it, make it void. And on the contrary, the Christian who believes in the doctrine of the cross, in salvation by grace, and pardon and acceptance through the Saviour's merits, is in truth, the best observer, and the most consistent defender of the law. He vindicates to the utmost, both its authority and its justice. He maintains the honour of God as a wise Lawgiver, a just Judge, and a righteous Sovereign. Not one

jot or tittle of God's word or commandment, does the true believer presume to make void, or question, or explain away. He defends God's authority and power over all his creatures; he acknowledges the justice and equity of every dispensation of his providence; and never extols any one attribute, not even his mercy, at the expense of another.

Permit me to notice two or three particulars of the improvement that we should make from our subject. And

First. You may here see how dangerous it is to decide upon the doctrines of Christianity, before you clearly understand them. Many objections are made to the gospel and the doctrines of Christ, of which, they who make them, did they see their absurdity, and know how easily they may be obviated, would be ashamed. In human arts and sciences, we use more reason and modesty; we commonly withhold our opinions, or our derision certainly, till some knowledge of the subject has qualified us to judge. Religion alone, though the most important of all science, and most necessary to be understood, seems to be that of which men, however ignorant of it, conceive themselves competent positively to decide. On things which concern our temporary convenience only, or perhaps merely our amusement or curiosity, we consider with prudence and deliberation, and yet, strange inconsistency! where eternity is concerned, where every thing is at stake, no learning, or study, or precaution, is deemed necessary, we are ready immediately for decision. We naturally incline to advance our favourite notions with as much confidence, as if the whole frame of nature, with all the secret

counsels of its adorable author, were unfolded to our view. We ought rather, on a subject of such momentous concern, to tremble at the thought of error; to distrust our own judgment; to use all means of knowledge and information; and after all, to look with humble, praying hearts to God, for light and direction.

Let us learn also to reverence the wisdom and goodness of God manifested in the whole scheme of our redemption, and the excellence and consistency of the doctrines of salvation preached in the gospel. It is a salvation perfectly adapted to our fallen, sinful state, and wonderfully calculated to solve that greatest of all difficulties, *How man can be just with God!* To human wisdom it seems impossible. But with God we see that even this, and if this, that every thing is possible. In this doctrine which the apostle so clearly and so firmly establishes, it appears, to use his own words, “that God may be just, and yet be the justifier of those who believe in Jesus Christ.” This is a scheme of salvation, which extols the goodness of God, without impeaching his truth; it magnifies his mercy above the heavens, without diminishing aught of his justice. It is a system in which, as the psalmist finely expresses it, “mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” By receiving this doctrine we establish the law, and honour in the highest degree, the wise and holy being who ordained it; we show that God is true, though all men are liars.

One thing only remains then, but that is of all the most essential; it is, that with pious joy and thankful hearts, we receive this saving doctrine; that we no

longer go about to establish our own righteousness, but humbly and most gladly submit to this righteousness of God. Let us honour the law, by trusting in the Saviour who has fulfilled it; who has redeemed us from its bondage and penalty, and restored us to the liberty of the sons of God. This is a body of divinity almost in a word, that Jesus Christ is “the Lord our righteousness.”

And let us not forget, that “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;” that good works naturally grow from a true faith. No one cordially believes in Christ; no one has true penitence, or a lively faith, who does not bring forth fruits meet for repentance; who does not break off from his sins and become the disciple of Christ. He notices the absurdity of calling him Lord, and at the same time neglecting to do the things which he commands. It is impossible to honour him as Lord, but in proportion as we endeavour to do his will. While then we disclaim all merits of our own, trusting only in his, let us do our utmost to follow his example, and live to his glory. Let our conduct, as well as our doctrines show, that by faith we establish the law.

And to Him who is the end of the law for righteousness to those who believe; to Him who so loved us, that while we were yet sinners He died for us; to Him who worketh within us, to will and to do what is pleasing to God, be ascribed the kingdom and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON VI.



IMMORTAL LIFE BROUGHT TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.

2 Tim. i. 10.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ—hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

THE whole of this verse in connection with what precedes, teaches that God's purpose of salvation, which was established in Christ Jesus before the world began, is now, by his appearing in our flesh, made manifest. What is typified, predicted, and continually though more obscurely intimated, in the scriptures of the Old Testament, is now made known to every one who has ears to hear the gospel. What was before a great mystery, is now clearly understood, that Christ, by his death and resurrection, has abolished death; has changed it to a hopeful sleep. "They who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him:" they will rise with their Saviour and live with him for ever. It may, therefore, be affirmed, and in the text it is affirmed, that "Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel;" that

by the advent of Christ in human nature, and the publishing of his gospel, mankind obtain a clear knowledge and well founded hope of eternal blessedness.

This is a declaration certainly and highly interesting to all men, and to Christians especially; and to show its correctness by removing the difficulties which it seems to involve, and obviating the objections urged against it, is a subject not unworthy your present attention. The proposition before us is, *That the knowledge we have of life immortal, is through the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

To this it may be objected, that mankind believed in a future state and the immortality of the soul, before the gospel was preached and where it has never been heard. And true it is, that even among the heathen and in the Pagan world, the people had some general belief and expectation that the soul would survive the dissolution of the body; but this belief was so vague and obscure, and so interwoven with impure doctrines, idolatrous rites, and absurd fables, that it was any thing rather than *light*: they were, as the prophets represent them, “in darkness and the shadow of death.” And the gospel times were often predicted under the figure of a light which should rise upon the Gentiles and shine upon the nations. Even the philosophers among the heathen, with a few exceptions, were so far from bringing to light the truth and certainty of a future state, that by their vain speculations they involved it in greater darkness. They had no way to *abolish death*; the dissolution of the body was an insuperable obstacle in every scheme which they could devise. In their reasonings they darkened counsel, by words without

knowledge; and, as St. Paul says of them, “professing themselves to be *wise*, they became *fools*.” No Christian congregation certainly will doubt that in regard to the Gentile world, life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel.

But in regard to the Jews, a question of no small difficulty has been involved in the subject. The Israelites were God’s chosen people, separated from the world by laws and religion given them by divine revelation. Our first reflection naturally is, that to them certainly would be given a clear knowledge of immortal life; that the scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, having the same author, would teach the same things; that the same doctrines of life and immortality which are preached in the gospel, would have been taught in the law. And yet so far is this from being the fact, that some have doubted and some even denied, that a future state of existence after death is, in all the five books of Moses, even intimated. And this have unbelievers from the Sadducees in our Saviour’s time, down to a Bolingbroke and a Gibbon, and to many at the present day, urged as an objection to the light of the gospel and the truth of Christianity. It is not, they say, to be reconciled, that the Jewish dispensation, having the same author as the gospel, should neither promise or threaten any reward or any punishment beyond this present life. In meeting this objection, it should be considered first, that the fact is not fairly represented. Though Moses did not speak directly of a future state, it is not true that he says nothing respecting it. He speaks of it very early: it is more than intimated in the prophecy, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s

head; which was to be done by *abolishing the death* that the serpent had brought upon our race. Here was laid the chief corner stone on which are built our immortal hopes. In the history of Enoch, Moses certainly speaks of another life and as what was well known. And what is much more to the purpose, the laws and rituals instituted by Moses are evidently intended and wisely calculated to typify and symbolize all those "good things to come," which since in due time have been fulfilled in the advent of Christ and the preaching of his gospel. The death of Christ, by which he "put away sin," abolished death and restored man to life, was clearly prefigured and set forth, by the sacrifices under the law, and in others of the Mosaic institutions. And the temporal Canaan, the rest promised as a reward to the faithful Israelites, was clearly a type of better promises, a heavenly country, a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Every thing indeed taught in the gospel, was taught under the law, though for reasons presently to be considered, they were taught obscurely. And the apostles of Christ could truly declare, as they did, that in preaching the gospel they "taught none other things than Moses in the law and the prophets did say should come." And when Christ came, it was not to destroy the law but to fulfil it; not one jot or tittle of it did or could pass away without fulfilment.

We have too the most satisfactory evidence, that the patriarchs and God's faithful people of old, looked for better things and a better life than this world could give them. And truly does our 7th article say, "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testaments everlasting

life is offered to mankind by Christ; wherefore they are not to be heard, who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises." Christ bids us search the scriptures of the Old Testament for a knowledge of him; and in preaching his gospel, we as often take our text from the Old Testament as from the New. And for this we have the undoubted authority of himself and his apostles, who in Moses and all the prophets, expounded the things concerning Christ. They show clearly the evangelical sense of the scriptures of the Old Testament; that the same gospel was preached to Abraham, which is now preached to the world, verifying the prediction, that in him, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. The apostles show that God's people of old, "all died in the faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Moses himself, who gave the law, "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." Great numbers, "of whom the world was not worthy, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promises, God having provided some better things for us, (clearer light, and more spiritual means,) that they without us, should not be made perfect;" that they should not enter into their final rest, the perfect joys of God's heavenly kingdom, till Christ should appear on the earth, his gospel be preached to all men, "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in," and the whole family of the redeemed be together exalted to the heavenly Canaan.

What then is objected, is not in fact true, that the old fathers looked only for transitory promises, and they are not to be heard who feign such things. Moses taught what the gospel teaches; and in the Psalms and the prophets following, the rays of evangelical light were still brightening to the eyes of the faithful. But such still was the obscurity, these truths and doctrines were so concealed under types and figures and the ritual institutions of the law, that the Christian dispensation was necessary to bring life and immortality to light; and the truth of our text is still evident and certain. For shadows, we now have the substance; for types, we have the reality; and what was prophesied, is now fulfilled. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen, with healing in his wings.

But it is thought by many to be still a difficulty, and as such, has been urged with too much success, that Moses did not directly and clearly speak of a future state. Why does this darkness rest on a point of such importance? Why are we left to infer the doctrine of immortality from types and symbols and figurative expressions? When Moses gave the law to the Israelites, why did he not add the sanction of future rewards and punishments? Why did he not in direct language, warn wicked transgressors that the wrath of God would pursue, and his judgment await them in another world?

It is proposed then, to extend our view of this important subject, and to meet the objectors more upon their own ground. This reason urged against religion, when fairly examined, will fall out for the furtherance of the gospel. This fact, that Moses in

giving the law did not support his institutions by the doctrine of future rewards and punishments is, when rightly viewed, an evidence of its truth, and shows that he acted by divine authority. It gives us also a more vast and comprehensive view of God's wise providence, and the unity and consistent plan of the work of redemption. For the Jewish dispensation, as St. Paul has in many places fully shown, was not intended to be in itself a complete system of religion, and a way of salvation; it was "a shadow of good things to come;" it was as "a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ;" it was an antecedent dispensation, to prepare the world for the advent of the Saviour, and the establishment of his religion. Hear an apostle reason on this subject. "Is the law against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. Before faith came, (before the gospel was preached,) we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed." "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added, because of transgressions, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made." Thus you see, that what men make an objection, is a part of the divine plan; what they account foolishness, is the wisdom of God.

The old world became exceedingly corrupt, and were destroyed by a flood. With the surviving family God made a covenant, and gave them a few righteous laws. But as they multiplied, wickedness again increased; and a new wickedness it seems was added, a sin which perhaps the antediluvians had not known. Religion was corrupted; the worship of

idols was gradually introduced; men began to adore as divinities, gods that could not save. A long period of heathen darkness ensued. To preserve, during that age of spiritual ignorance, the knowledge and worship of him the true God, the Lord was pleased to interpose by a miraculous providence; he chose a people to himself, and he became their King. In fulfilment of his promise to Abram, and in remembrance of his mercy, he raised up Moses, and delivered his people from bondage, and gave them a code of laws. His wisdom is seen in his choice of a people; he elected a *small* people that his own power and providence might be the more conspicuous. He chose an obstinate, rebellious, and stiff-necked people, that they might claim nothing above other nations as due to their own merits; that, as Moses tells them, they might understand and know that it was not for their own righteousness, that God drove out the heathen, and gave them their land; and to teach all the world that heaven will not be the reward of our merit; that salvation is of grace. Had they been a numerous people, possessing a rich country, immense revenues, political wisdom and military skill, their own arm might have claimed the victory. But they were destitute of each; they were taken from a state of bondage; delivered by the arm of God; led poor and unarmed into a wilderness; there fed and humbled by a special providence; then sent without implements of war, to conquer many warlike nations, and possess their country. Every thing was so ordered, as to convince them that God alone was their strength and protector.

The law too, given by Moses, was adapted to the same merciful purpose; to teach them to trust in God, and believe and hope in a Saviour; in the prophet whom he should raise up like unto Moses. In all ages of the world, and among all ancient nations, the sanction of future rewards and punishments, has been deemed necessary to the perfection and stability of civil government. Human laws, and the wisest rules of social life, with no restraint upon wickedness, but the fear of detection and of punishment in this world, have never been, by any ancient nations, thought sufficient to preserve peace and good order. Probably not one crime in ten is detected here; and very many pernicious vices there are, which cannot be subjected to human tribunals. All the ancient lawgivers considered it wise and necessary to add religious restraints; to hold up to view the awful terrors of a future judgment. This was particularly true of the Egyptians, among whom the Israelites had long dwelt; and also of those lawgivers who, about that period, went out from Egypt and settled in the countries around Canaan. Moses was learned in all their wisdom; he understood their policy; he also undoubtedly believed in a future state; he prophesied of Christ, and trusted in him; and had respect, in what he did, to an eternal recompense and reward. If then, we see Moses, who was so well versed in human wisdom, neglecting it in his institutions; if, contrary to the practice of all the lawgivers around him, he did not hold up the terror of a future judgment, “to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just,” what is the most reasonable inference from this omission? Evidently it was be-

cause his laws did not need that sanction; they had a divine authority which was still more effectual. He had no need to tell them that God, who knew their hearts, would call them to account in another life; he told them, and he had power to convince them of what was more likely to restrain them, that the Lord Jehovah was then their temporal king; that the God of Abram, and Isaac, and Jacob, who knows the hearts of all men, would immediately judge them in this present world; that if they were obedient, God would reward them; but if they dared to violate his laws, however secret might be their transgressions, his righteous hand would surely chastise their wickedness. This was giving laws to some effect. Had he told them of future punishments, though he had been an impostor, none could detect him. But such were his laws, and such the sanctions he gave them, that the experience of every day would show, and it did show the nation, whether he taught them of his own authority, or by commission from God. The Lord became himself both witness and judge: no hypocrisy could elude his all-seeing eye; no criminal escape his avenging arm. And thus can you see that this omission of the Jewish lawgiver, to speak directly of future rewards and punishments, far from being a difficulty, or an objection to his authority, confirms it, shows that he was directed by the wisdom, and supported by the hand of God; he had the most powerful of all sanctions, a miraculous providence.

We may add, that in those times of greater simplicity, the light of tradition from Noah and his sons, was not wholly extinguished. The dark cloud of idolatry was fast spreading over the earth, but the

rays of light were not yet wholly obscured. In Egypt and Canaan, and parts adjacent, there was yet remaining a general belief in a future state; and of course, a revelation of this great truth from heaven was then less needed. As the ultimate object of the law was to prepare the world, and especially the Jewish nation, for the advent of Christ, so the immediate object was to preserve the knowledge and worship of the true God in opposition to all idolatry. The grand question then was, not whether they who please or displease God, will be rewarded or punished in another state; but who is God? by whom will that judgment be awarded? What was then particularly needed, was to show the world who rules it; who is the great arbiter of human destiny. And to this great end, the legation of Moses was wonderfully adapted.

That Moses rejected human policy, and acted under a divine commission, we have a further, and very remarkable proof. It was the policy and custom of the heathen nations to have their religion in common, and hold to an intercommunity of gods. When one nation conquered another, they adopted the superstitions of the conquered people; took their gods into partnership with their own, and seemed to consider this as no inconsiderable part of their acquisition. This worldly wisdom likewise, did Moses totally reject. The laws he gave, and the religion he established, allowed of no fellowship with the idolatries of any nation; all the superstitions of the heathen were held in utter abomination. And what better evidence could he have given that his trust was in the Lord Jehovah, and that he acted by a

divine commission? And here, by the way, you may see the fallacy of the reasoning from the supposed fact; that idolatrous nations did not persecute each other on account of religion. How could there be persecution, where there was no ground of contention; where they were all united in worshipping any thing except the true God? To oppose their worship, to deny any of their gods, was accounted treason against the state; and how it was punished, the death of Socrates and others, will bear testimony. Their policy was to acknowledge all divinities, except him, who was to them an "unknown God." In Athens, we are told there were almost as many gods as there were people. And the objection which in later times the heathen had to true religion was, what they deemed, its illiberality, or this its unsocial nature. They hated most bitterly, and they cruelly persecuted God's people, because they would not acknowledge or sacrifice to their gods. They had no manner of objection to Christians worshipping the true God in trinity and unity, provided Christians would also sacrifice to their idols. And we still find in Christian countries, and even among those who bear the Christian name, the same kind of liberality, men offended because all doctrines and tenets are not held in common; and censuring those conscientious Christians who are scrupulous respecting articles of faith.

Should any one, after what has been said, be still disposed to urge the question, why Moses did not more clearly reveal the certainty of a future state, we have a sufficient answer implied in the text before us; the time had not come, when, according to the plan of our redemption, life and immortality should

be brought to light; this high honour had the Lord reserved to grace the advent of his blessed Son; this was to be peculiar to the Saviour's gospel, that all men may see that he is indeed "the Sun of Righteousness," "the light of the world;" that without "the brightness of his shining," we are "in darkness and the shadow of death." The faith required of God's people, before Christ came, was according to the light they then had, a faith in a greater light in due time to be revealed. They saw obscurely those things afar off, and were persuaded of them. The Mosaic law, we have seen, was but a preparatory institution. What future life could that law have taught, except that which the gospel teaches? But if the law had taught what the gospel teaches, the gospel would have been anticipated. Moses then would have had the honour which God reserved for his Son. It was God's will that the law should be given by Moses; but that grace and truth should come by Jesus Christ. If grace and truth had come by Moses, the Jews would be justified in adhering to the law. It would have been, (contrary to Paul's assertion,) a law, giving life, and verily righteousness would have been by the law. Then all those many passages of the New Testament, which express so strongly the insufficiency and the nullity of the law, after the death of Christ, would be incorrect. The Jews earnestly contended that their law was sufficient to give eternal life. But they had no just ground for this belief; God had precluded their vain pretensions, by giving them a law "having the shadow (only) of good things to come, and not the very image of the things;" and he gave them sacrifices which

could never make the comers thereunto perfect; the intent of the law was to bring them to Christ. In the fulness of the time which God had appointed, the Messiah appeared, and he fulfilled the law and the prophets; and as the apostle says, “he hath obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the Mediator of a better covenant, which is established upon better promises;” or still more briefly, he has “brought life and immortality to light.”

And we may further observe, that mankind could not have so full a hope of life immortal, till the foundation on which alone it rests, was revealed and made known. This foundation is the resurrection of Christ. This was wanting to convince men, that of a certainty, they shall rise to immortality. And of course, this momentous doctrine of a future state, could not, in the system of man’s redemption, be fully brought to light, till Christ had assumed human nature, and died, and risen from the dead.

It appears then, that the Lord has done all things well; even the objections brought against the gospel, when closely weighed, confirm its truth. The Saviour, who is the light of the world, was revealed to it in the manner, and by such degrees as infinite wisdom saw fitting. “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” And it is easy to show, would the time admit, that the period when this light shone in full splendour upon the world, was the most seasonable that could have been devised. I have endeavoured particularly, though very briefly, to evince that Moses’ not adding to his laws the sanction of future rewards and punishments, shows that God was with him, and confirms the truth of all he wrote. And

that the manner in which he represents evangelical truth, forms a very consistent and very essential part of the plan of man's redemption. The right view of the subject, must lead us to say with our apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God." Who, without feelings of astonishment, can behold this stupendous work, commenced from the foundation of the world, ordered by infinite wisdom, and in one regular, consistent plan, carried forward by an Almighty hand, and by means the most wonderful, to its glorious consummation? Compared with this power of God, and wisdom of God, the wisdom of man, and all the objections of gainsayers, are but foolishness. What ought Moses to have said of immortality more or less than he did say? He was raised up to be instrumental in leading men to Christ. "He was not that light," but he bare witness of that light, and prepared the world for its rising. If we object to this part, we may as well object to the whole work of redemption. We may as well ask, why did not Christ appear at an earlier period? Why is not God as wise as man? It ought to convince us that the "foolishness of God is wiser than men." If no reasons could be given why the work of redemption was 4000 years in maturing, it would ill become us to make this an objection. We may as well demand why other things are so ordered as we see them; why a tree is a whole century in its growth, which might be raised up in an hour? Why are there not more or less planets in this solar system? "Why is not man a god, and earth a heaven?" The institutions of the law were intended to be the dawn of that blessed day which now illuminates the world.

The rising of the Sun of Righteousness was at that period, which in the view of divine wisdom was the most fitting. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."

Let us not foolishly waste our time in objecting that this light was not differently given; but endeavour to be thankful for the blessing, and to walk as children of light. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Let us carefully, "by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality." That our Saviour Jesus Christ has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, is to us and to all men, a subject of unspeakable joy. For such stupendous mercy, let it be our concern, and our pleasure, to express our thankfulness, and set forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives. To the author of our salvation, to the Father, the Son, and the Divine Spirit, be rendered eternal praise.

SERMON VII.



ON THE EXTENT OF CHRIST'S REDEMPTION.

1 Cor. xv. 22.

As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

THEY, who with serious attention hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, and what he has done to save mankind, must desire first of all, to know to whom those tidings are sent. Is Christ the Redeemer of all men, or did he ransom but a part of the human race? May we believe of a certainty, that it was for us he died on the cross, made expiation for sin, and triumphed over death; or was it for a chosen few unknown to man in this present world? This is, indeed, a question of momentous concern to those who preach, and to all who hear the gospel. It is an inquiry in which we have no guide but the word of God. The opinions of men are discordant; the deductions of human reason are fallible; on theological systems, we cannot safely rely. To the law and to the testimony we must have recourse. What is written? How readest thou?

In the text which is now commended to your particular consideration, St. Paul declares, that “as in

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive;" that the benefits of our Saviour's death and resurrection, are as extensive as the effects of Adam's sin. The same truth he has not less clearly, and much more fully shown in his fifth chapter to the Romans. But this is a question of such high importance, and in which we are all so deeply interested, that it is chosen for the subject of our present discourse; in which it is proposed, if the Lord permit, First, to examine the testimony of God's word respecting the extent of Christ's sacrifice and merits: And, Secondly, to show in what respects the redemption of Jesus Christ, and salvation through him, are general and extended to all.

I. The texts of the scriptures which speak of Christ as the Saviour of mankind, generally, are so many, that we can but make a selection. Passing by the Old Testament altogether, it will be sufficient to refer you to some remarkable passages in the New. And among the first and most remarkable of these, is the message to the shepherds of Judea, by an angel from heaven, who declares the Saviour's advent to be "good tidings of great joy to all people." Now if there were any, for whom Christ did not appear as a Saviour, to them his birth could not have been good tidings, nor a subject of great joy. This declaration of the angel our Lord confirmed, when he ordained his apostles, commanding them to "preach the gospel to every creature." The same redemption, the same Saviour, the same offers of life eternal which they proclaimed to one, they must proclaim to all without exception.

Christ is often spoken of as the Saviour of the world in such a manner, as evidently to comprehend all men. He is "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." He told Nicodemus that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved; that whosoever believed in him should not perish, but have eternal life;" that the same offer was generally to all. God is said to be "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." St. John says, that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours (who are Christians,) only, but for the sins of the whole world." St. Paul says to him, "we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those who believe." And also, that "Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all;" that "God our Saviour will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth;" which evidently means, not that God has decreed, or positively ordained, that all men shall be eventually saved, but that the dispensations of his mercy in Christ are general, without respect to person; that "Christ tasted death for every man."

Indeed, this doctrine that Christ died for all, was so well known in the apostles' days, that St. Paul, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, reasons from it, as a truth that no Christian would doubt; "If one died for all, then were all dead." And his argument implies, that except Christ did die for all, all were not dead in sin; all mankind are not in a fallen state. But we are taught every where in the scriptures, and especially in our text, that both positions are true; *In Adam all die, in Christ all are made alive.* Both

of these must be admitted, or both denied; to be any way consistent, we must hold, that in Adam all men did not die, or that in Christ they are all redeemed from death.

By reasons too, drawn from the doctrines and the language of the scriptures, it is evident that Christ is in some sense, the Saviour of all. Thus he is called the second Adam, the second man or federal head. To be the second Adam, he must have the same extensive relation to all, as had the first Adam. If in the one all die, in the other all must be made alive. And accordingly, St. Paul reasons to the Romans; "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin," and "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Every where it is shown, that the remedy is as extensive as the disease; and indeed, that we gain more in Christ, than in the first Adam we lose.

It is a further confirmation of this doctrine, that Christ's redemption is made to all men a ground of obligation and duty to God, and an aggravation of sin. They who sin under the light of the gospel, are said to "do despite to the Spirit of grace;" "they count the blood of the covenant, wherewith they are sanctified, an unholy thing." St. Paul asks, "how they shall escape, who neglect so great salvation," implying certainly, that the salvation had been truly offered to some, who neglected it. He also forbids our causing those to perish for whom Christ died, clearly admitting, that those for whom Christ died, may perish. St. Peter prophesies of false teachers, "who privily

shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction;" and through the second chapter of his second epistle, he speaks of the pernicious conduct and the dreadful end of some whom yet the Lord has bought. And if the Lord has bought, if he has made atonement for some of those who perish, undoubtedly he has for all. Those wicked heretics, who, as he shows, "turn from the holy commandment given unto them," as the swine returns to his filth, and who perish in their ungodliness, were redeemed by the Saviour; they were purchased by his blood.

The nature which Christ assumed, shows too, that his redemption is general. He did not take the nature of any select number of individuals, but human nature generally; he was the seed of the woman, equally related to us all; my nature suffered on the cross no less than yours; Judas, as well as Peter, had a High Priest touched with the feelings of our common infirmities. He delighted, whilst on earth, to call himself "the Son of man;" a Saviour who was related to, and represented the human family. All who appertain to this family, all the children of the first Adam, have this Saviour for their kinsman according to the flesh. Your sins caused him to suffer on the cross, no less than mine. And if he suffered for us both, for both also he made expiation.

And accordingly, the scriptures further teach, that all men are bound to honour Christ as their Redeemer. We are obligated to honour him as our Saviour; to receive him as both Lord and Christ. Are there any children of Adam who ought not to say, "we are not our own, we are bought with a price?" They who

refuse to say this, deny the Lord that bought them. Do not the scriptures also, command all men every where to repent, and believe in Christ? Unbelief is condemned as a sin, as a great and unpardonable sin; "he that believeth not, shall be damned." But if Christ be not their Saviour, if for them he did not shed his blood, how could they believe in him as their Saviour, without believing what is not true? If there be any for whom Christ did not shed his blood, in denying him as their Saviour, they would maintain the truth. And yet, what does Christ himself say on this subject? "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." This, you see, is particularly their condemnation; for this, chiefly, they who hear the gospel will be judged and punished, because they do not receive God's testimony, that Christ is their Saviour; because they prefer the darkness of their own sinful hearts, to that light which cometh down from heaven, and is the life of men. So too, St. Paul asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" What hope can they have of escaping future condemnation, who refuse to be saved in that way, which divine mercy has opened to them? But how can any neglect the salvation of Christ, if Christ be not their Saviour; if he did not shed his blood to redeem their souls? Here then, is also a clear proof from scripture, that all are redeemed; all are bound to honour Christ as their Redeemer; all are bound, at the peril of their eternal welfare, to believe in Christ, and embrace the salvation which his gospel offers.ⁱ

We may add what is not less to the purpose, and fully confirms this doctrine, that the same gospel is to be preached to all men; God is willing that all shall be saved; and it is our duty to labour and to pray for all. But how could we in faith pray for the salvation of all men, or preach to all, except we believe that Christ is their Saviour; that the door of life eternal is opened to them, the same as to us? We have, indeed, the fullest assurance of this; we know God will have all men to be saved, as much as he wills that all men should do justly, love mercy, and keep his commandments. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. We are commissioned to preach the gospel to every one without exception. God will have all men come to the knowledge of the truth; we must pray for all. But how great, I repeat, how dreadful would be our embarrassment, in praying for the salvation of men, except we believe that they have a Saviour; that to them also, the door of life is opened! Would Christ on the cross have prayed for the blaspheming Jews, if the blood he was then shedding, was not offered for their benefit? How, indeed, could any man pray for himself; how could we plead the merits of Christ for the pardon of our own sins, and for our acceptance with God, if it be a matter of uncertainty whether Christ died for all? If any are left out of his purchase, who are more likely to be so left out than we? If he did not taste of death for every one, we who are so unthankful, and so unholy, may well doubt whether he tasted death for us. Who have less claim for any interest in his blood, than we who have lived so wickedly,

and have so often crucified him afresh? I know not what assurance we can have that he died for us, but that most comforting truth, that he died for all. Were it revealed that there is even one descendant of Adam for whom Christ did not shed his blood, what penitent soul would not with trembling, exclaim, surely I am he? Who would dare to approach the living waters, were not this the invitation, "Whoever will, let him come, and take the waters of life freely?" We know that in our heavenly Father's house is bread, not only enough, but to spare; at his table is still room. We know that he expostulates and beseeches, "Why will ye die?" He chides and condemns the folly of those who obstinately perish. "Because he can swear by no greater, he hath sworn by himself." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live." How often, as Christ with tears tells the unbelieving Jews, would he have gathered them as a hen doth her brood, and they would not; the fault was wholly theirs. It was God's will that they should repent and be saved, but "they rejected the counsel of God against themselves," and to their own perdition. St. Paul said, "My prayer to God, and heart's desire for Israel is, that they may be saved." He knew that their own hardness debarred them from God's kingdom: there was balm in Gilead, and a physician there. St. Paul knew that God had not said to the seed of Jacob, "seek ye my face in vain." He knew well who had said, "What could I have done more to my vineyard, the house of Israel, that I have not done in it?" Their failure of fruit, was their own fault.

II. There is then, a sense in which the redemption of Christ, and salvation through him, are general and extended to all. In what sense, or in what respect this is true, is also worthy of our particular attention.

Should any ask, or wonder why, if Christ died for all, it does not follow that all will be saved, let him open his bible at almost any chapter, or let him look at the conduct of mankind, and he will find an answer. It is, the Saviour himself says, because men love darkness rather than light; their sins more than their souls, and this world more than heaven; they will not come to him, that he may give them life. For, let it be remembered, our redemption and our salvation, are not the same thing. The gifts and calling of God are one thing, the use we make of his blessings another. We should carefully distinguish what God has done for us, from that which he works within us, and requires of us. Christ has redeemed us, but it is by the Holy Ghost that we are sanctified and renewed; and except a man is thus "born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Christ has died for our sins, and he has risen for our justification, but he does not repent nor believe for us; and he tells us, that without repentance and faith, we cannot be saved.

1. Christ is the Saviour of all; because, as we have seen, he died for all; he has made satisfaction to divine justice; he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of us all. Believers in him may now plead his merits and the sacrifices of his cross, for their pardon and

justification. The law of God, though just and holy, will no longer condemn them.

2. He is the Saviour of all, because for all he has conquered sin, and satan, and death; those mortal enemies, which, by ourselves, could never be subdued. "He took part of flesh and blood, that, through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them, who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage." He came into this world to destroy the works of the devil; and though he soon left the world, he will reign as the Christ, till he hath put all enemies under his feet: the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

3. He is the Saviour of all, because to all he has become the resurrection and the life; thus opening to all, a new and living way to eternal blessedness. The dead shall hear his voice, even all who are in their graves, and shall come forth. In our text it is expressly said, that "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." He is "the resurrection and the life." "In him," (says Mr. Scott,) "and through his mediation, all the dead shall rise again. He is the author of the resurrection, and it will be effected by his power." The wicked he will raise as their Lord and judge; the righteous will rise with him as their head, to reign with him for ever. "In every sense, he is the resurrection, the source, the substance, the first-fruits, and the efficient cause. He is, indeed, the fountain, the support, and the giver of life, temporal, spiritual, and eternal; and no man can

have it but by and from him;" not only is he the way and the truth, but also the life. By him is immortality brought to light; he has led captivity captive. Through his mighty power, all shall awake from the sleep of death, and rise to bliss or wo.

4. He is, of course, the Saviour of all; because, to all he has opened a new and living way to immortal blessedness, and salvation is made possible to every creature. He has made satisfaction for their sins; the penalty of death for Adam's transgression, is cancelled by Christ's death and resurrection. In the one, we all die; in the other, we are all made alive. By the Saviour, we are now in a better state than that in which were the first pair in Paradise. For in that state, one transgression was inevitably fatal. "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die:" but now, "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world."

5. He is also the Saviour of all, because to all generally, and without any exception, he extends the offer and the means of salvation. Wherever his gospel is preached, we know, to our sorrow, that many "neglect this great salvation;" and we know not how such can escape the righteous judgment of God; but however they neglect or despise it, to them is the same offer made, as to those who believe. Many are called, however few may be chosen. Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, to every one of you, the same advantages, and privileges, and means, are extended. To you all, equally and impartially, the same bible is open; the same

gospel is preached, and the same Saviour offered. The invitation is free to all; "whoever will, let him come." The ministers of Christ are commanded to go into the streets and highways, and into all places, where men are to be found; and, far as persuasion can do it, compel them to come in. May not he be truly called the Saviour of all, who has made expiation for their sins; who has conquered their spiritual enemies; who will raise all from the dead; who has opened to all a way to life eternal; who has made salvation possible to all, giving them also, the offer and means of salvation? Yes, all things through Christ's redemption, are now prepared, for your being accepted with God, and blessed for ever. The invitation is general; "Come, for all things are now ready;" a sacrifice is offered; an atonement is accepted; justice is appeased; God is rendered propitious; every preparation is made; there is yet room at the table of salvation; there is bread enough and to spare; nothing indeed is wanting but the guests to sit down. The same feast of fat things is offered; the same bounty is exhibited to those who accept the invitation, and to those who "make excuse."

But though Christ is thus generally the Redeemer of all who die in Adam, to be eventually saved in him, with an everlasting salvation, we are required to repent of our sins and to believe his gospel. As St. Paul writes to Timothy, "God is the Saviour of all men, and especially of those who believe." To all salvation is made possible; to all it is offered; but in a more proper sense, is God the Saviour of those who submit to his righteousness; who receive and obey the gospel; who actually turn to God through

faith in Christ, because they will not only live beyond the grave, but will be for ever blessed in heaven.

Salvation then, we see, is so far general, that it is placed within your reach. You are so redeemed from the curse of the law, that a way is opened by which you may escape its condemnation; you may, any, or all of you, draw nigh to God in full assurance of faith. Christ has assumed the nature; he has suffered the pains; he has fulfilled the righteousness; he has made the atonement, and has gained the victory over sin and death, which were necessary to constitute him the Saviour of all mankind. There is nothing proper to a Redeemer of our whole race, which he has left undone. So was Moses, his type, the deliverer of all the Hebrews, though ever so many of them had refused to leave Egypt, or through their sins had perished on their way to Canaan. And yet he was the deliverer, especially of those who believed his word, obeyed God, and persevered till they entered the promised land. If any came short, it was through their own evil heart of unbelief. God gave them a deliverer sufficient for all. The same favours and privileges were bestowed upon those who murmured and turned back, as upon those who continued faithful. “This Moses, whom they refused, saying, who made thee a ruler and a judge, the same did God send to be a ruler and a judge.” And the like is true, as St. Peter shows, respecting Christ: God sent him to be to all a ruler and deliverer; and such he is, whether men receive or reject him. In estimating his character, we must regard, not the opposition of men, but the counsel and purpose of Almighty God. The gift is not the less real and good, because men

despise it. If Christ has died for you; if the Lord has laid on him your iniquity; if he has led captivity captive, and poured out upon all flesh, the unspeakable gift of his Holy Spirit, and freely invites you, and all the ends of the earth to look unto him and be saved, what, in his own language, by his prophet, could he do more? What more can be wanting to constitute him a Saviour “to you, and to all people?” Though you refuse to have him rule over you, God has appointed him to rule; to him all power is given, in heaven and on earth. Through his merits, God is ready to forgive you that great debt of ten thousand talents; but if this, his goodness, does not lead you to repentance; if his offered mercy does not induce you “to love mercy;” if you will take by the throat a fellow-creature who owes you but a hundred pence, he will not be especially your Saviour, but cast you into prison, till the whole immense debt is paid. Let us, as an apostle exhorts, take warning by those Israelites, who, after they had been redeemed, fell in the wilderness. Those things happened for our example, and are written for our learning, “lest any man should fall after the same example of unbelief.” “He that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy; of much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace.”

But when we speak of what is required of men, that they may be saved in Christ for ever, let us not forget, that by grace we are saved; that of ourselves, and in our own strength, we cannot change our hearts,

nor return unto God by repentance and faith. It is by his Spirit working within us to will and to do, that we can obey his word, and work out our own salvation. Yet from what we read in the holy scriptures, and learn of God's merciful goodness, we may humbly trust that he will give us the aid which is necessary, that we may do his will. On this subject would I speak with the utmost reverence and awe. If God's Spirit sometimes ceases to strive with hardened sinners, it is, we may believe, in the case of those who have long resisted the Holy Ghost, and done despite to the Spirit of grace. The scriptures do not teach us that men perish because God refuses his aid, but because men reject his counsel against themselves. Such was the case of those who perished in the flood; such was the sin of those who withstood Moses; and of those also, who crucified their Saviour. St. Stephen tells them, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye." We read of those who grieve, and of those who quench the Spirit, and of those who receive the grace of God in vain. In the sixth chapter to the Hebrews, it is evidently admitted, that "those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost," may so fall away, that it is impossible to "renew them again unto repentance." Our Saviour has taught, that of all sins, that against the Holy Ghost is the most unpardonable; and how such sin can be committed, but by those with whom the divine Spirit some way strives, it is not easy to conceive. It is evident from the scriptures, that God's Spirit does strive with many who are not finally saved.

And who would dare to say of himself, that he has received no portion of divine grace? Have you never experienced any feelings of remorse; any compunctions of heart, or awakening of conscience? Have you never perceived an inward monitor, restraining you from sin, or exciting you to fear God, and deal justly with men? Has not God at any time, either by his word, or by the mouth of his ministers, warned you of the peril of sin, nor called you to believe and be saved? Certainly you have received from the Saviour much knowledge of God, and what you ought to do. You have been taught from the scriptures your fallen, sinful state; and at sundry times, and in divers manners, have been invited and urged to turn to God. He has given you understanding, and to your understanding he has revealed the nature and excellency of that salvation, which is in Jesus Christ. Let us not, therefore, add to our other sins, so great a sin, as denying that his grace is sufficient for us. The grace of God which bringeth salvation has so appeared to all men, that all who neglect it are without excuse.

Let us so improve from this subject as not to abuse it, nor turn from the straight and narrow way, to the right hand or to the left. Let no one fear that for him the Saviour did not shed his blood; and let no one presume, that because Christ died for all, of course must all be saved. That lie of satan, "Ye shall not surely die," as God has said, was what first emboldened, and still emboldens man to sin. Christ as the Saviour of all, has opened to us the door of life; he has offered one sufficient sacrifice for sin; he has found a place for repentance; he has shown how

God can be just, and yet justify those who have sinned; but he is especially and eminently the Saviour of those who believe and obey the gospel. They are called according to God's purpose; they shall be delivered from the second death, and never come into condemnation. And of this blessed number, let us pray, and let us strive that we may be. Receive with meekness the ingrafted word which is able to save your souls. Think not to mend or improve God's word, nor attempt to make it agree with any favourite system. Let it be our great desire spiritually to live in Christ. As he died unto sin once, and now lives unto God, "likewise reckon ye yourselves also to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Amen.

SERMON VIII.



THE INTENT AND USE OF THE LAW.

Gal. iii. 19.

Wherefore then serveth the law?

THERE is, perhaps, no question in theology, of equal importance, so imperfectly understood, as the one which these few words propose. As the apostle has in this chapter clearly shown, and the scriptures every where teach, we are not justified or saved “by the works of the law,” but “by the hearing of faith.” In the gospel of Jesus Christ, is offered to fallen man pardon of sins, reconciliation to God, and eternal life from the free grace, the gratuitous mercy of God, obtained for us by the intercession of a Mediator. The doctrine which lies at the foundation of all we preach, is Christ crucified. To those who ask what they shall do to be saved, we must answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” To those who asked him, “what shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” he answered and said, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” We preach Christ alone, as “the end

of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth."

But why then, do we preach the law? Why "by the terrors of the Lord," do we now persuade men? If by the terms of the gospel, we are not under the law, but under grace, of what use is the law in the scripture scheme of doctrine? And why are its rigorous precepts still made a part of our public teaching?

Not only is this a difficulty in the minds of many Christians, but what is worse, ignorance respecting it, is the source of errors. For by some the law is so preached, as almost to exclude the gospel; they seem to view the religion of Christ, as but little more than a correct system of morals; and to represent salvation as depending chiefly on the merits of our own works. And others seem to hold, that believers in Christ are released from the moral obligation of God's law; that with regard to them, its condemning power is wholly done away; and that to preach the law, is to depart from the gospel. On this ground, some have objected to the public reading of the Ten Commandments.

We find in the New Testament, and especially in the writings of St. Paul, that this difficulty occurred to the earliest Christians; and that objections of this sort were proposed to the first preachers of the gospel. The apostle has stated it in the words of our text, and takes it up as an objection in the mouth of his opponents: "Wherefore then serveth the law?" Of what use can it be in the system of doctrine which you apostles preach? How can your teaching it, promote salvation by faith in Christ? We trust that an answer to this question will be profitable to a Christian

congregation. May the Spirit of God guide us in the discussion, and conduct us to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

The text has respect more particularly to the law given by Moses; but it is intended, the Lord permitting, to treat the subject in the larger sense, as containing the whole of God's law revealed, or prescribed to men. For the same question may well be asked, respecting any moral precepts which we inculcate, and it is evidently of very great importance, that we should clearly understand what good purpose any law serves under the gospel dispensation. The inquiry will show, that it answers four great ends, or purposes in religion; and that it is not less necessary, and much more useful to preach the law now, than it would, or could be, if the gospel were not revealed. The law now serves to convince men of sin; to bring them to Christ; to restrain the wickedness of mankind, and to conduct the faithful in the way of righteousness and peace. It may, indeed, be said, that the whole use of the law "is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely," "To bring us to Christ." But I trust, through the divine blessing, it will be profitable to be more particular, and to consider, that

I. One use of the law is, to convince men of sin. And this conviction of sin, or repentance towards God, is, every Christian knows, the first, and one of the most essential steps towards the attainment of that salvation which is in Jesus Christ. The scriptures have concluded all under sin. The gospel views our whole race, as by nature, destitute of all moral goodness whereby we can be justified, and under the

general sentence of condemnation. To convince us of this, God gives us commandments which are holy and good; he promises blessing and life to those who keep them; and threatens the transgressor with pains and death. Our imperfect obedience, to say the most, or rather our wicked violation of God's righteous laws, shows that we are guilty and justly condemned. Hence, we see the fitness of many passages of the scriptures, which would otherwise seem strange and difficult: as when St. Paul says, "The law entered, that sin might abound." The law is holy, and the commandment is holy; and he who ordains the law is just and good. He gave the law not to make men sinners, but to show and convince us that we are sinners. In the like sense, the same apostle says, "The commandment which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death:" and for a very obvious reason, he had violated the commandment; he had sinned against God; of course, instead of obtaining the life which is promised to those who keep God's law, his transgression incurred the death which was the just penalty. Thus, "the law is the ministration of death;" not because God is unjust or severe, but because men are sinners, and the wages of sin is death.

It has been urged as an objection against God's laws, and against his religion, that conscience, or a sense of guilt, is the effect of habit or education; that we suppose things to be wrong or sinful, not because they really are so, but because we are taught so to believe. And this they pretend to confirm by the fact, that what is esteemed as vicious or sinful in one age, or one country, is in another, thought to be consistent with true religion and good morals. But

this confounding conscience with a rule of conscience, proves only an ignorance of Christian doctrine. They err not knowing the scriptures, nor “wherefore serveth the law.” The truth of the doctrine, that the carnal mind is enmity against God; that man is by nature inclined to sin, depends not on the extent or correctness of his knowledge; it is the evil disposition of his heart to depart from God, to injure his fellow creatures, and neglect his own best good. Men, though they live in the most savage state, and no law be given them, still have this evil heart always ready to show itself, as circumstances occur. Accordingly, St. Paul declares, that “until the law, sin was in the world, but it is not imputed where there is no law.” Men are not accounted guilty of transgressions which they have not committed, or of particularly violating laws which have not been to them revealed. “I had not known sin, but by the law; I had not known lust, except the law had said, thou shalt not covet.” But if the law had not said this, God would know that the heart of man is disposed to sin. There is still the same disposition in man to oppose the righteousness of God, though no law is given him. Let a law pure and holy be given him; a law which requires him to love God supremely, and his neighbour as himself, and his corrupt nature will be manifest; and the more he is brought into the light of divine truth, the more will his depravity appear.

Suppose for illustration, the case of an obstinate, froward child. Should his parent give him no commands, his disposition would be less evident; nor would he be punished for any particular act of disobedience. But let his father order something dis-

pleasing to the child, and his perverseness would appear. And however good or just the command might be, the offence in consequence would abound. And suppose there were two such children in different families, and their parents should command them to do things of an opposite nature; the one is ordered to labour, and the other to refrain from labour; by disobedience, they would equally manifest the want of filial piety. From this, you may see how idle is the conceit that men are not sinners, because the same laws, and customs, and notions of moral goodness, do not prevail in every age and every land. In no land, and in no age, is there a natural disposition “to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” The propensity of our nature is to be selfish, proud, and worldly; to idolize the creature; to spend our days in vanity; and to do to others, what we are not willing that others should do to us.

Here then, we have one excellent use of God’s law; it convicts us of sin; shows the depravity of our nature; it humbles our pride, and drives us from every strong hold of self-righteousness. It is a mirror which reflects the deformity of the heart; the extremity of our distempered state, and sends us, with trembling solicitude, to the physician of our souls.

II. And this leads us to consider a second use of the law; it brings men to Christ. By a view of its justice; by a fear of the penalty, and a sense of the guilt of transgression, many, and perhaps we may say, most converts to the Christian faith, are first awakened to righteousness, and moved to flee

from the wrath to come. They see and feel their perilous state, that they are perishing sinners; by the inflexible justice of a righteous God, condemned: they are sensible that “by the law there shall no flesh be justified; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” How awful seems the state of a soul thus convicted! A just law condemns him. The vengeance of a holy God pursues his guilty soul; and should he sink down into hopeless perdition, he feels that it would be a righteous doom. But not thus hopeless is his state; the sound of a great salvation salutes his ear: “Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him:” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

And thus do the terrors of the violated law prepare men for the comforts of the gospel. By opening the sinner’s eyes to his ruined state, the God of mercy displays before him the riches of his love in Jesus Christ. Preaching the law, sends men to their Saviour for refuge, and produces repentance not to be repented of. It gives a deep and thankful sense of God’s mercy in Christ; it exhibits this great salvation as what it is, a miracle of grace; they who are thus awakened, know that much is forgiven, and they love much.

We see here, the wisdom of God in his dealings with his chosen people Israel; in giving them laws and ordinances, to try and to prove them; to know, and to make known, what was in their heart. The rites and laws he gave them, were to be in force till the promised seed should come; and they were so

wisely, so wonderfully framed, that while they were types and prophecies of the Messiah, they convinced, or they ought to have convinced the people how much they needed his salvation. Most truly does the apostle say, a few verses after our text, "The law was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." If man were pure and free from sin, a perfect, holy law, would show his purity and increase his happiness; it would manifest to his conscience and to the world, his disposition to love God and to do his will. But it shows sinners their guilt and the worth of their Saviour.

Evidently then, the law serves these two very salutary ends, of convincing men of sin, and bringing them to Christ. The preaching of it produces repentance towards God, and faith in him who is "the way, and the truth, and the life."

III. And it has also a third use; it restrains the wickedness of mankind; and in this view, it is exceedingly useful. This is noticed by the apostle, and is the answer to his question in the text, "Wherefore serveth the law? It was added, because of transgressions:" one great design of it is, to operate upon the fears of men, and by its awful terrors, to arrest the sinner in his mad career; to intimidate his soul; to restrain his wicked hand from violence, through the dreadful apprehension of a future judgment. That this is one great and wise end of law, every lawgiver among men, and every civilized people must be sensible; for this is almost the only purpose of human laws; to deter men from evil;

to keep them within the paths of equity and righteousness, and to turn the hands, if not "the hearts of the disobedient, to the wisdom of the just." And if human laws, which are so imperfect, which can but take cognizance of a few outward acts, and which are so easily and often evaded by the artful and wicked; if human laws, with all their imperfections, are of great use and efficacy in preventing wickedness and promoting peace and good order in society, much more extensive, powerful and efficacious, must be the mandates of an Almighty, heart-searching God. His laws are not confined to the outward act, nor are they dependent on human testimony; they reach the conscience; they sift the soul; they penetrate the secret windings of the most deceitful heart.

"The veil of night is no disguise,
No screen from God's all-searching eyes."

By the scrutiny of the divine law, the works of darkness are dragged into open day; the guilty soul has no hiding place from the divine presence. Perhaps there is not a soul so abandoned to corruption; so heaven-daring in transgressions, as not sometimes to fear and to tremble at the thought of God's righteous retribution. When the minister of God "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled." And a wicked Herod was constrained to do many good deeds, by the law of God, declared from the lips of his faithful servant, John the Baptist. Thus does a merciful God control the wickedness of man, and preserve the world in greater peace. If his law does not bring all men to Christ, it prescribes limits to the ungodly, and sets them bounds which they shall not pass. Many, very

many, who think themselves unbelievers, and exult in defying God, and contemning his mercies, cannot be wholly what they boast of. As they partake in the works, so do they in the faith of devils; they sometimes “believe and tremble.” When by some awakening event of God’s providence, he harrows up their guilty souls, “the violated law speaks out its thunders” to their conscience, and the agonies of remorse, like a smothered flame, are increased by the efforts to conceal them. God has not, daring sinner! left himself without witness; nor can you, with all your sin, and pride, and affected infidelity, be wholly an unbeliever. You cannot wholly escape the fear that God is true. You may hate his character, oppose his government, and wish to dethrone the Almighty, but sometimes his terrors will reach your heart, and make you feel that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” The day may yet come, when that law which you now despise, and trample under foot, will, like the crown of thorns which encircled your Saviour’s head, present its thousand points to your guilty soul; and if it does not lead you to repentance, may goad you on to the horrors of despair.

It is more pleasing, though not perhaps more profitable to reflect, in how many thousand instances and to what great degree, men, from the excellence, and the holy influence of God’s law, are induced to do good, and to conform in part at least, to the holy commandment delivered unto them. This is of vast benefit to society, and to Christians it is an unspeakable consolation. When the disciples of Christ look back on their lives past, and reflect in how many

instances they have been preserved from wickedness and folly, through the fear of the Lord, and from regard to his righteous laws, their hearts are filled with gratitude and praise. It is, we know, required and is most desirable, that the love of God should so rule our hearts, as to produce obedience to his will; but “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” and happy it is when this restrains us from sin and excites us to our duty.

IV. There is still another end which the law serves, and no less worthy our thankful consideration. It conducts the faithful Christian in the way of righteousness and peace; it very much assists us in doing God’s will, living to his praise, and obtaining an assurance that we are accepted with him. And how else should we walk and please him? His law is an unerring rule to guide our steps; it awakens our diligence; exalts our hopes, and conducts in the straight and narrow way which leads to life. When men are truly awakened to righteousness, and their minds, by God’s grace are renewed, they have a sincere desire to live to God. But how could any, even the best Christians, live to God and do his will, except they first know his will respecting them; except he himself prescribes to them the way which he approves? A pious child, who loves his parent, desires to be conformed to his will; he receives with pleasure his commands; he rejoices in the opportunity of showing his affection and pleasing the father whom he respects and loves. And thus do Christians love the Father of their spirits; with like satisfaction do they read and search the scriptures, and endeavour

to understand God's law, and to do his will. The study of his word makes them more and better acquainted with his perfections, and the observance of it increases their assurance of a blessed immortality. Hear with what pleasure the psalmist meditates upon God, and how great was his delight in keeping the divine commands: "I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. Make me to go in the path of thy commandments, for therein is my delight. Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn thy statutes."

By the law of God the diligence of his people is very much excited. Its threatenings awake their apprehensions, lest they should be found unfaithful. By its promises of rewards, they are exceedingly encouraged to run, not only with patience, but with joy, the race that is set before them. The excellence of the law increases their abhorrence of sin, and their love of God; and their obedience, increases their confidence; it is an evidence that the Spirit of God is with them; his Spirit then bears witness with theirs, that they are his children.

We see then, that the use of the law is very evident, and very great. It is the instrument by which the Holy Ghost "convinces us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment;" by which we are able to live to God's glory, and to work out our salvation. And is this law, so excellent in its nature, and so useful in its purposes, to be in our preaching neglected? How can the ministers of Christ declare the whole counsel of God? How can they effectually and faithfully preach the gospel, except they often

appeal to the law and to the testimony? We must surely declare that "law of the Lord, which is an undefiled law, converting the soul; that testimony of the Lord which is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple: those statutes of the Lord which are right, and rejoice the heart; that commandment of the Lord which is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes." Would we benefit society; would we make men better and happier in this world; would we restrain all manner of ungodliness, and aid the cause of good morals and good order? Then certainly we must preach God's law with all its terrors, and in all its purity.

Or if our object is to bring men to Christ; to rouse the sleeping soul from its perilous state of sin and death; to show the worth of a divine Saviour, and induce sinners to lay hold on eternal life; to preach the law will be most effectual. This, if any thing, will awaken them to righteousness, and cause them to flee from the wrath to come; for "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Till men know and feel the peril of their natural state, they are not likely to feel much interest in the appointed ransom. The awakening terrors of the law, produce the deepest comforts of the gospel. As the water, which, in foaming torrents descend from the mountains, subside in peaceful rivers, and flow gently through the valleys; or as the clouds which soar majestic in the heavens, crowned with gold, and armed with thunder, come down at length in refresh-

ing showers, to cleanse the atmosphere and fertilize the earth; so do the agitating terrors of a convicted soul, subside into the calm enjoyment of hope and peace, and eventually benefit mankind by Christian works, of piety and love.

And so too, if we would train believing souls for a better world; if we would lay the surest "foundation against the time to come;" if we would make Christians truly what they profess, and what they desire to be, disciples of Jesus Christ; if we would have them watchful and diligent, and unwearied in well doing, that they may be indeed the salt of the earth, and their light shine before men to the glory of God, we must carefully instruct them in the way of his commandments; we must make them familiar with the divine law. What true Christian is not ready to say with the psalmist, "I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments?" Or how can any Christian honour God in his life, till he knows God's will respecting him? The Christian knows indeed, to his great sorrow, he feels that he comes far short of that perfection which the law of God most justly requires. This makes him humble and penitent, and keeps him at the foot of the cross. It causes him to have less confidence in himself, and more charity for others. It keeps his eye fixed continually on Jesus, as the author, and also the finisher of his faith. He claims nothing on the score of his own merits; his own righteousness is not named or thought of; he is more and more sensible that by grace only he can be saved, it must be the gift of God. This is the natural and sure effect of knowing the justice, the strictness, and

the spirituality of the divine law. "The just live by faith;" on this rock only, do they hope to stand. Boasting is excluded by faith, but hope and charity are increased. While you are conscious that you love and fear God; that you believe in Christ; that you trust in his merits, and delight in following his example, your soul has peace. Such is the expression of the pious Christian; the corruption of your nature continually lusting against the Spirit; the imperfection of your best deeds as compared with the purity of God's law, and the holy example of your Saviour, produce in you meekness and humbleness of mind: but you delight in the law of God after the inward man; to hear the scriptures explained, and to become better acquainted with their true sense, gives you pleasure. "They are more to be desired than gold; they are sweeter than the honey-comb. By them are God's servants taught, and in keeping them, there is great reward." By making his laws your study, you are daily becoming better men, and more steadfast and faithful Christians; your reverence for his perfections, your trust in his providence, and your love in return for his goodness, are thereby increased. By conforming more and more your heart to his will, your wisdom to his righteousness, your ways to his commands, your confidence is strengthened; you walk with more assurance, and your hopes are exalted. Let us pray and strive, that by us and among us, the laws of God be so carefully taught, so truly received, and so faithfully followed, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." And to God, for his holiness and mercy, be rendered unceasing praise. Amen.

SERMON IX.



ON PREDESTINATION.

Rom. viii. 29, 30.

Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

No question in theology has been more agitated, or more perplexing, than the doctrine of election and predestination, or the purpose and decrees of Almighty God respecting future events and the eternal salvation of mankind. There are few doctrinal points more evident and incontrovertible, than the foreknowledge of God, and the moral freedom of the human will; and yet to reconcile them, and obviate every objection, is a matter of no small difficulty. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Being infinite in knowledge, as in every other perfection, all times and events, (whether past or future to us,) to him are probably present. His works, his creatures, and

their volitions, are continually before him; and he orders all things, and governs the universe according to the counsel of his own unerring wisdom. That in his eternal purpose, and the determined system of his providence, some part of the human race will be actually saved in Jesus Christ, and enjoy with him immortal glory in heaven, is clearly revealed in the scriptures, and is what no Christian will deny. But what views exist in the divine mind; what is his secret purpose; on what principles his decrees respecting our salvation are planned; whether his election of some to eternal life has regard to what he foresees of their faith and obedience, or is the mere sovereign determination of his own will; whether it be actually in the power of mankind, by their own volitions, or by any thing which they can will or do, to commend themselves to the divine favour, and obtain future blessedness; or whether all things, both causes and events, are so immutably fixed by the decree of God, and his foreordination, that men are under absolute necessity to act in all things precisely as they do, are questions which have been long and ardently controverted, and are not likely, in this world, to be soon decided. That these disputes have been injurious to the interest of religion, and the unity of the church, will hardly admit of a question.

In the ardour of disputation, men are apt to charge on their opponents, doctrines and inferences which they disavow, and to expose themselves to the like misconstruction. Some, reasoning from the nature and foreknowledge of God, advance doctrines respecting his sovereignty and decrees, which seem, by natural inference, to annihilate the distinction between

good and evil; to represent God as the author of whatever we be or do. Others have inclined to the opposite error, and have so represented our power to will and to do, as in appearance, to dishonour God's free grace, and make man the author of his own salvation.

The intellectual endowments of the human mind, are among the most noble gifts of God; but great has been their abuse. Men venture to reason on the nature, and will, and decrees of God, with the same assurance, as if the immense system of his providence and the secrets of eternity, were open to their view. To the inspired psalmist, it was a comforting reflection that he had restrained his aspiring thoughts, and had not presumptuously spoken of things which are too high for human investigation. And St. Paul, after discoursing on what is revealed of God's "purpose of election," observes, that his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out.

The text now before us, is a beautiful summary of what the scriptures teach on the subject of predestination to eternal life; but this passage is silent on the points most controverted, and on which uninspired men are too ready to decide. What it does teach, it is our present duty and purpose to investigate, and practically apply.

"Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." These first words, have indeed the appearance of deciding an essential, and one of the most controverted points; they seem to teach, that God predestinates according to his foreknowledge; and some infer, that those whom God has decreed to bring to glory, are they whom he foresaw would believe in

Christ, and obey the gospel. Such is, indeed, the sense of this English word foreknow; but the corresponding Greek has other meaning, and may relate to things past as well as future. Thus does St. Paul use it in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts: "They (the Jews,) knew me from the beginning." If this were rendered, "they foreknew me," it would be nonsense, or certainly not the true sense. To know, in the scriptural language, often means to approve, or to view with favour. And to foreknow, is sometimes to approve of before. In his eleventh chapter to the Romans, the same apostle writes, (as we have it translated,) "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew." But God foreknows all men; and the true meaning, we must suppose is, that God has not utterly cast away those whom he has before approved and owned as his people.

But admitting (what other texts of scripture indeed seem to teach,) that God's predestination is according to his foreknowledge; yet, whether this means his foreknowledge of the faith and obedience of the elect, or more generally what he foresees, will be most wise and fitting for accomplishing the designs of his providence, is not explicitly declared. Nor is it certain that the word predestinate, has in the scriptures, or ought to have the sense which many, with much confidence, attach to it. The nature, the mode, the influence, and the effect of God's predestination, are, in a great degree, certainly "secret to us." "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" Some seem to believe, that predestination is God's arbitrary decree, determining, by an irreversible fatality, all actions and events. Others

think that it takes into view the faith, and volition, and deeds of men, and is so ordered, as to leave them truly free and accountable creatures. Others still suppose, that predestination regards chiefly the plan, and way, and means of our salvation in Jesus Christ. And a fourth class suppose, that this purpose of God according to election, has respect to nations or descriptions of people, and not to individuals; or that it has regard to the character and qualifications of the elect, and not to their persons.

The apostle further says, “Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.” And of this calling Christians think differently. Some understand by it, that he called them sons; some that he called them by the preaching of his gospel; and others, that he calls by irresistible and indefectible grace; that the elect can neither reject the call, nor totally fall from their Christian state.

With regard to these abstruse and controverted points, our church has admirably shown her wisdom and moderation. All the doctrines of grace she takes simply as they are taught in the holy scriptures. She prescribes no test respecting the hidden counsels of the Almighty; but leaves those mysteries as she finds them, in the word of God. She pretends not to untie the knot of such inexplicable difficulties, but allows to her members a latitude of opinion on these speculative points, and between those who controvert them, she maintains a neutral ground. In her articles, and liturgy, and homilies, she clearly teaches and uniformly maintains what are truly called the doctrines of grace. In the seventeenth article, the doctrine of election and predestination is set forth in scriptural

language, and with an evident regard to this passage of St. Paul, chosen for our present subject. We may consider that article, as the sense in which the church understands the text; briefly stating its doctrine; showing the comforts of its right application, and the peril of presumptuous speculations.

In the doctrines of election and predestination, of Adam's sin, of human depravity, of man's inability to turn to God and do good without preventing grace, our church seems to differ from what is sometimes called the Arminian creed. She never attempts to modify or to explain away those sacred doctrines, but receives them as taught in the holy scriptures.

In other points, she falls as much below the high tone of Calvin's belief. "Predestination to life," she defines to be "the eternal purpose of God whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid,) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation, those whom he hath chosen in Christ, out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called according to God's purpose, by his Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works, and at length attain to everlasting felicity." Such is the article; and by careful attention, may be seen its conformity to the passage chosen for our text; and yet the church, even here, has not departed from her scriptural neutrality.

We find here, indeed, some of the doctrines usually denominated Calvinistic. But the doctrines of that creed most controverted and most objectionable, that God has decreed the sins of men; that Christ died for a part only of the human race; that a great part are predestinated to eternal misery; that Adam's fall was positively foreordained; that God's election and predestination, have no regard to the faith or works of men; that divine grace cannot be effectually resisted, and that such as receive it, cannot fall away and perish; none of these doctrines does our church in this, or in any of her articles, teach.

But though our church wisely avoids those peculiarities which distinguish differing sects, she gladly unites with all in the essentials of the gospel, and cordially admits to her communion, such as confess the fundamental doctrines of the cross. What pious, devout follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, who reveres the language of God's word, may not conscientiously subscribe to a fair construction of this much disputed article? Predestination is, we may well admit, God's eternal purpose to save those whom he has chosen. But of this purpose and of this election, we know nothing more than is revealed to us in his word. In the divine mind, no doubt, are circumstances, and views, and intentions, which, did we see them, would obviate every difficulty, and silence every objection. We are not told that this election has no regard to what men believe and do, and it is very evident, that they who are so saved, are "vessels made to honour." No honour can be greater than is freely given them. In order to be thus saved through Christ, it is made necessary that they should

“be called according to God’s purpose;” even the purpose which the scriptures teach; they are taught and exhorted to turn to God through faith in Christ, and to do works meet for repentance. And this the best Christians do, not of themselves, and by their own strength, but “by God’s Spirit working in due season.” What pious believers will deny or doubt, that “they through grace obey the calling;” that believers “are justified freely;” and that “they are made sons of God by adoption,” being by nature children of wrath, even as others? “They are made like to the image of his only begotten Son,” that he might be the first-born among many brethren. “They walk religiously in good works,” without which, their faith would be dead, and they could not be saved. By patient continuance in well doing, they are prepared for “everlasting felicity, which, by God’s mercy, they attain.” These all are the plain doctrines of scripture. It is a remarkable fact, showing this article to speak the language of the bible, that it is claimed both by Calvinists and Arminians, as teaching their respective doctrines.

Let it be particularly and well considered, that of God’s secret purpose, we have no knowledge. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of his law.” What motives operate, what ends are designed, and what conditions admitted in the secret counsels of God, who will decide?

But though “secret things belong to God;” though in the counsels of the Almighty are purposes and views which the heart of man has never conceived,

yet St. Paul in our text, and the church in her article, reveal and set forth, how we may be saved in Christ, and obtain an evidence of our election. And it is worthy of particular regard, that the article speaks not of all who shall be saved in Christ, but of those only, who have this visible evidence of their election; of those only, who are actually and visibly called; who in this world receive the gospel, and live as Christians. It speaks only of God's purpose to save those who "obey the calling," and "walk religiously in good works." And what Christian ever doubted, but that such will, "at length, by God's mercy, attain to everlasting felicity?" But does any Christian on earth believe that no others will finally be saved, besides those here described? Are we to suppose that all who die in infancy will be lost? But infants are not called, nor do they obey any calling, nor do they, nor can they walk religiously in good works. The framers of this article no doubt believed, that a part at least, and probably that all who die in infancy, will be saved. And also, that myriads of others, who never hear the gospel, may be saved through the merits of Christ. But if this article embraces all whom God purposes to save, then none can be saved but actual professors. We must, therefore, either suppose that none will finally be saved but the few who grow up to age of understanding, hear the gospel, and become members of the visible church, or we must admit that this article, and also St. Paul in our text, do not speak of all who will be finally saved; but rather of God's revealed purpose, or way of salvation. It is a description of those who are visibly God's elect, not excluding

others from possibility of salvation. How many infants, how many of the heathen, how many of those who never hear the gospel, will finally be saved, is left "secret to us;" but what we need to know, is clearly taught; how they who have ears to hear, may be saved in Jesus Christ. St. Paul in our text, speaks of none as predestinated and finally glorified, but those who are actually called, and become conformed to the image of Christ; of none but those who hear the gospel and become believers and faithful Christians. In "those whom God did foreknow, and also did predestinate," are included no infants, nor any Jews, or heathen, however pious. The apostle shows how those adults to whom the gospel is preached, are chosen and saved in Christ. And the scriptures every where teach, that all who are so called and so chosen, if, as St. Peter exhorts, they "give diligence to make their calling and election sure," will "attain to everlasting felicity." They who are so predestinated will be also glorified; "if so be (as St. Paul just before had stated,) they suffer with Christ, that they may be glorified together." This is the revealed way in which God chooses us from the world, and saves us in Christ. They who obey God's call according to his revealed purpose, walk religiously in good works, and persevere to the end, shall be saved.

We must then acknowledge that "the godly consideration of predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comforts to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing

up their minds to high and heavenly things." Such merciful dispensations of the Almighty, to reclaim us from perdition and raise us to heaven and happiness, must expand the heart with love, and fill the soul with joy.

But (as the article adds,) "for curious, carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes, the sentence of God's predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them, either into desperation," or into bad living, no less perilous than desperation. Some viewing themselves as reprobates, as not included in the number of the elect, as debarred of all hope of salvation, may be hurried into despair. Others by an opposite abuse of the true doctrine, fancying that they are absolutely certain of life eternal; that their salvation is fixed by an immutable decree, may naturally grow careless of good living, and fall into sin. To such, the doctrine is indeed "a dangerous downfall," but the fault is not in the doctrine, but either in men's ignorance of its nature, or in their perception of the truth.

The church, therefore, has wisely directed us in the close of this article, to "receive God's promises in such wise, as they are generally set forth to us in the holy scriptures," without indulging our speculations on hidden mysteries, or pretending to be wise beyond what God has clearly revealed. And "in our doings, that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared to us in the word." Of his secret will, our speculations, of course, must be uncertain; and to make it our rule of life, would be as hazardous as it is absurd.

Let us now then, adopt the spirit and follow the example of the church, in construing and applying our present text. For though this remarkable passage does not confirm or decide the speculative points respecting predestination which are so much controverted; yet, like all holy scriptures, it is written for our learning, and is profitable for doctrine and for instruction, provided we are content with what is written, and receive that sense which is obvious. The apostle is here comforting Christians under these afflictions, to which, for an example to the world, God is pleased to call them; and thus applied, his words are indeed consolatory. He had just said in the words preceding, that “all things work together for good to those who love God; to them who are called according to his purpose.” And all certainly, who love God and fulfil his purpose in calling them; all who believe his word and do his will, are called according to his purpose.

This unfailing consolation to Christians, “who suffer according to the will of God,” the apostle confirms, by the beautiful climax of mercies contained in the text; “Those whom God did foreknow,” whom he did view with favour, and determine to call by the dispensations of his grace, to be his chosen, peculiar people, “he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son;” he appointed various means and ordinances suitable to give them the knowledge of the truth; to renew their hearts by faith, and guide them in the steps of their Saviour. Sufferings among other means, are used to purify their souls; to renew a right spirit within them; to cause them to be conformed to the image of Christ;

that they may become his brethren, and by adoption the sons of God.

“Moreover whom he did predestinate;” whom he thus distinguished as his elect, “them he also called;” to them was the gospel preached and its truths made known. They are called to a knowledge of God’s grace in Jesus Christ; to the profession of religion; to various trials of their faith and patience; and to the performance of all the duties which are required of Christians.

“And whom he called, them he justified.” They who are called according to his purpose; they whose faith and holy lives “are to the praise of the glory of his grace,” which is God’s purpose in their calling, he accounts as just; their sins are forgiven, and they are accepted in the beloved; for the just live by faith.

“And whom he justified, them he also glorified.” In this world he honours such faithful Christians as his chosen people, his adopted children, and the brethren of Christ; blessing them with all spiritual blessings. In a future state, they shall be glorified with the angels; they “shall shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their heavenly Father.” The apostle had just before shown, that “if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together.” And these words must be kept in view; for there is no promise that they who are called will be glorified, except they are thus conformed to the image of Christ; except they do, by patient continuance in well doing,

suffer with him. The promise is to those who conform to Christ's example of patience and love.

Our text thus understood, perfectly agrees with the apostle's subject, and with all that the scriptures teach. And is it not more wise and safe to follow this sense, which is plain and practical, than to attempt to prove from those words a doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, which, without any practical benefit, leads "to doubtful disputation?"

Among other improvements from this important passage and subject, let us learn to be content with what God has clearly revealed; to be sensible how fallible are all human reasonings on the secret purposes of the Almighty; and reflect, as does the apostle in the close of this his argument, that God's judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. Reasonings, which to us appear conclusive, with God may be foolishness. What we suppose to be fitting and right, with him may be impracticable or pernicious. And on the other hand, things which seem to us impossible or absurd, may, to the divine mind, appear easy and perfectly consistent. There are many propositions that to us seem reasonable, we cannot, we dare not deny them, which may be very erroneous, or be true only in a sense which we do not fully comprehend. God is perfect; but how can we, short-sighted creatures, judge of his perfections? His foreknowledge is beyond our comprehension. He has a will and a purpose secret to us; and how then can we know them? And how do we know that his election and predestination are not perfectly consistent with equal justice and mercy to all his crea-

tures? We believe that God wills and works what is for his own glory; but are we sure that he acts from no other motive? Is benevolence no part of his nature? Is not the happiness of his creatures one great purpose of his providence? And supposing that whatever God does is solely for his own glory, may he not, in perfect consistency with his own glory, do what is best for his creatures, and be equally good to all? His wisdom may be so perfect, and his power so infinite, that no act or conduct of his creatures, though left ever so much to their own freedom, can eventually diminish his praise. Whether men obey his commands or disobey, he can still so predestinate, according to his foreknowledge, that, under every possible contingency or supposition, infinite glory shall redound to God.

To examine too inquisitively into the deep things of God, is like looking at the sun with the naked eye; we rather injure our sight, than discover truth. The celebrated Luther observes, that “many have perished in the indulgence of curious inquiries.” We who through blindness can scarce comprehend the few rays of divine promise, rashly attempt to fathom the majesty of God in all its brightness. With eyes of moles we affect to survey the splendours of the deity. No one can doubt, but God hath a secret will; but what can exceed the folly of attempting to comprehend it! His word speaks to the vainly curious, as our Lord did to Peter: “What is that to thee? Follow thou me.” Something has the Lord revealed, and all, no doubt, which is necessary in this world to be known; and especially the way of salvation, and how we may be assured that we are of God’s

elect. But there are many questions respecting the origin of evil; the decrees of God; the redemption of mankind, and salvation by grace, which are yet mysterious, or not clearly revealed; and by attempting to explain them, we “darken counsel, by words without knowledge.” “The eternal purpose of the Almighty concerning mankind, has depth which no mortal line can fathom, and height to which no mortal wing can soar. This the wisest, and the best of men in all ages have acknowledged, and happy would it have been for the church,”* had Christians always been content with what is written, and instead of contending for their favourite notions of predestination and secret decrees, left these intricate subjects, as they are left in the holy scriptures, till that time, when that which is in part shall be done away; when we shall see face to face, and know even as we are known. “Happy would it be,” as Bishop Hall remarks, “were we all more engaged in finding testimonies of our own predestination to eternal life, and a sure interest in the precious blood of the Redeemer. Let us beat down those sins which make us obnoxious to perdition, and debar us of all comfortable assurances of the favour of God. Let us not subvert the faith, or distract the thoughts of others, by scholastical disquisitions, whereof the knowledge, or the ignorance, makes nothing to heaven. The straight and narrow way to blessedness, admits of no leisure for unprofitable speculations.” They are not of much practical importance. They who believe in particular election, are not less careful than others to

* Christian Observer, Vol. II. p. 445.

maintain good works. And many of those who abhor what is called Calvinism, firmly adhere to the doctrines of grace, with no less abhorrence of all claim to human merit.

Our ignorance of these things should teach us humility and reverence, and the utmost caution and diffidence in speaking of them, lest our defence of God's providence should be a sinful presumption, and like the three friends of Job, by our zeal for his honour, we should provoke him to anger. Let us receive his word with meekness, and not go beyond it, to do or to teach less or more. As the Lord commanded Israel, we are to build our altar of unhewn stone: "If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." Our systems of theology may be perversions of the scriptures. The fruits of God's word are most nourishing and wholesome in their wild state of beauty and excellence, as they come from the inspired pen. When you speak of eternal salvation, of its author, of the merits by which it is purchased, and the power through which it is wrought, you cannot ascribe too much to God, nor too highly extol the freedom of his grace; the righteousness of man is not to be mentioned. And when, on the other hand, you speak of what men must do to be saved, you need not fear to use the language of inspiration; to show men the awful hazard of living in sin, and the immense importance of their turning to God and submitting to his righteousness.

And let us not forget, what the church teaches, that the right consideration of this subject "is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort;" and we ought so to apply it as to increase our consolation.

Who, or how many God has in his secret purpose determined to save, we are not informed, and it is vain to inquire. But you have here what and all that you need; you are clearly instructed in what shall be the evidence of your own election. If you are "called according to God's purpose," or "conformed to the image of his Son;" if you have "repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ;" or as the church in her article has well paraphrased our text, if you "obey God's call;" if you are "made like the image of his only begotten Son, and walk religiously in good works," you shall, "at length, by God's mercy, attain to everlasting felicity;" or, as our Saviour Christ has still more concisely expressed it, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." The scriptures reveal nothing of God's predestination, but what is pleasant and full of comfort. Those gloomy notions of reprobation which have driven some to desperation, or other dangerous downfall, originate in the groundless fears, or presumptuous reasonings of men. The true doctrines of Christ, are tidings of great joy to all who rightly receive them. Is it not pleasant to learn that Christ has put away your sins by the sacrifice of himself? Is it not an unspeakable consolation to hear from the lips of God's messengers, that you are invited to partake of this great salvation, and that God predestinates and supplies whatever is necessary to bring you to glory? Is there any one link in this chain of heavenly mercies contained in our text, which for the world you would have removed? It is a great mercy to be thus called; we should rejoice to be conformed to the image of our Saviour.

How cheering is the hope that we may be justified ! And who does not, of all things, most desire to be glorified ! As the apostle immediately adds, “If God be (thus) for us, who can be against us?” What power can separate us from his love? And who, in a gospel land, is, or can be deprived of these mercies, but he who refuses to receive them? Because he can swear by no greater, he hath sworn by himself: “As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; wherefore turn yourselves and live ye.” If you have repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and sincerely endeavour to be in all things conformed to his image, you need not doubt of your being called according to God’s purpose, and that he has so predestinated, that all things shall work together for your good. For those who love him, he will order such things as will best train them for glory. This he may do by afflictions, or other trials painful to our nature; in a God so merciful, and a Saviour so meritorious, we may well confide. He calls us in various ways, and by diverse instruments; he has appointed signs, and tokens, and seals of our election and adoption; by faith we are justified; through his grace we may do those good works, which he has prepared for us to walk in; and through his mercy, and the triumphs of our Redeemer, we shall, if we “endure to the end,” shine forth as the sun in his heavenly kingdom.

It is also an obvious inference from this our subject, that “we must receive God’s promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in the holy scripture; and in our doings, that will of God is to be

followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in his word." What we may suppose to be God's secret will, is no rule for us to walk by. Our theological systems, however plausible and admired, may be defective and fallacious. Our reasonings are uncertain, and the deductions which we make, should with great caution be received. "To the law and to the testimony;" let this be our motto. "What is written? How readest thou?" One clear promise, or one plain command of God's holy word, is of more worth than all our speculations.

i Finally, consider what cause we have to rejoice in the Lord and the power of his might. "If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?" Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. Let us readily receive the word of God, and by a faithful use of the means for that end appointed, endeavour to be conformed to the image of our blessed Saviour; and (in the very comprehensive words of an apostle) "give diligence to make our calling and election sure." Amen.

SERMON X.



ON LIVING TO GOD'S GLORY.



1 Cor. x. 31.

Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

THE apostles lived in those idolatrous ages, when, to the shame of human nature, men made with their hands the gods to whom they paid religious homage. The flesh of animals sacrificed to those senseless deities, was frequently sold in the markets, and used at feasts and entertainments. Hence, naturally arose among Christians, some scruples and questions of conscience about eating meats which had been offered to idols; and upon this subject does the apostle speak in the latter part of this chapter. He first forbids that the brethren should unite with idolaters in eating the things which they had sacrificed to devils; because, to eat of those sacrifices, as such was a religious act, and to join in the eating, was to join in the worship; in like manner he observes, as they who eat of the Jewish sacrifices are partakers of the altar. And the apostles, in a counsel held at Jerusalem, directed

that Christians should “abstain from meats offered to idols.”

St. Paul observes further, that all things which in themselves are lawful, are not expedient. All meats are given to Christians; “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused.” And he had before shown in the eighth chapter, that they who had a just knowledge of this their liberty, might, with propriety, eat meats sacrificed to idols. Christians, knowing idols to be nothing, that is, no gods, would disregard them, and offer their thanks to Him, who is the giver of all good. “Howbeit,” says the apostle, “there is not in every man that knowledge; for some, with conscience of the idol unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an idol, and their conscience being weak, is defiled.” Some were so weak in the faith, or so ignorant of true religion, that when they eat such meats, they could not help considering themselves as uniting in idol worship. And to avoid such painful doubts, he advised that none should eat of the meats which they knew to have been offered to idols. Yet when they bought meat in the shambles, or if they were invited to eat with unbelievers, he advises, or directs them to make no inquiry for conscience sake; not to ask whether the meats have been so offered, but to eat what should be set before them, with hearts thankful to the true God. But, if any man should say unto them, “This is offered in sacrifice to idols,” they were not to eat, lest they should give offence, or bring some disgrace upon their religion.

And from this subject he makes the conclusion contained in our text; “Whether, therefore, ye eat

or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." In regard to that question, and indeed in all things, Christians are to avoid whatever will needlessly give offence to their brethren, or bring any disgrace upon their holy profession; it should be generally a ruling object with us in all things, to honour God, and to promote the salvation of mankind. That this is the meaning of our text, appears, we see from the occasion, or connection with what precedes. And it appears also, from the words which follow, concluding the chapter; "Give none offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God; even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." He pleased all men in all things, not as those who are called "men pleasers," or who "prophesy smooth things," to be esteemed and praised of men. He pleased them in whatever would promote their salvation. He would do nothing to weaken their faith, or hinder the performance of their duty. And when we do this, when we do all we can to save ourselves and others, we "do all to the glory of God." We honour God most, when most faithfully we obey his word, and do his will. And what he wills generally or chiefly is, that men should so believe and so live in this world, that they may be saved in Christ for ever.

But this text, and the duty it proposes, has caused some questions in religious practice, which it will be proper to examine before we proceed to the improvement.

As we are here commanded to do every thing to God's glory, it is made a question, whether it be not

sinful to act from any other motive, or to have any other end in view; and whether, in particular, it is right for us to make even our own salvation the end of our obedience; whether, so far as we are actuated by the fear of punishment, or the hope of any reward in this world, or the world to come, we are not selfish, and live not to God's glory; whether to obey the command in our text, we must not be willing to be happy or miserable through all eternity, as shall be most to God's glory. And this last has been by some made the criterion of a real conversion, that we are willing to be damned for the glory of God. In these notions, truth is strangely mixed with error; and it is of no small importance rightly to understand it.

First, then, this command to do all to the glory of God, evidently means, that God's glory should be with us a general motive and a ruling object, through all our lives; so that negatively, we never do any thing which we know, or have reason to believe, will dishonour God, or injure true religion. And positively we are to do whatever will promote his glory. But this does not interfere with many other subordinate motives. In a thousand instances, the things which we do, or leave undone, are, in a moral view, of such indifferent nature, that God's glory cannot be particularly the motive of our choice. In very many cases, you are permitted to do that which will best agree with your comfort and ease. When at home in your house, you may stand or sit; when on a journey, you may walk or ride; and at all times you may wear more or less clothing, as best suits your circumstances and convenience. Even in that very important

act of your life, the choice of a profession, or trade, or livelihood, you cannot always tell which of several will be most to God's honour; and you may follow that which will best suit your own interest and convenience; being careful always, that you have no motives, or views, or intentions, at variance with God's word, and inconsistent with your duty as a Christian.

The more particular question, whether your own happiness in a future state is a right motive to a religious life, is certainly no more difficult than whether it is right to make the obtaining of food, and raiment, and other temporal comforts, a motive to labour and to be industrious. You may as well doubt whether it be a sin to sow, in the hope of reaping, or to build a house with a view to living in it. In these things none have any scruples; and is it not as lawful to seek for spiritual good as for temporal; to make provision for our souls as for our bodies? May we labour for temporal riches which are doubtful and perishing, and not for those true riches, which neither moth nor rust can corrupt? It seems, indeed, very strange, that any one can make this a serious question, when throughout the whole bible our own good, and especially our eternal salvation, is so continually urged as a reason and motive of our conduct. The punishment of sin, and the blessedness of obeying God, are every where held forth in the clearest manner, and in the most awakening language, as inducements to repent and turn to God. Would these be thus held up to our view in the word of truth as religious motives to a Christian life; should we be exhorted to "flee from the wrath to come;" to "fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell," and to

“lay hold on eternal life,” if it were wrong to have regard to our own happiness and misery? In what part of the scriptures are we told that these should not be our motives; that we should not “have respect to the recompense of reward;” that we should not “strive to enter in at the straight gate,” nor to “work out our own salvation?” Not in our text certainly; for its meaning, as we have seen, is that we should do nothing to hinder, and every thing to promote the salvation of men. This is God’s will, and this indeed his glory, that men should be saved. And what God has joined together, let no man put asunder. There is no other way in which we can so honour God, as in promoting our own and others’ salvation. Nothing, indeed, can more exalt our love to God, or inspire us with more rapturous ideas of his astonishing goodness, than this blessed consideration, that he is pleased and honoured in the happiness of his creatures; that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn and live.

It may, we know, be asked and often it is asked, whether God is not equally honoured in the punishment of the wicked. We may say, and with great reverence and awe be it said, that God will be just in the final condemnation of sinners, according to the predictions of his word. Justice is one of his attributes, which are all infinitely glorious. His glory in punishing sinners, arises not from the pain, but the justice of their sufferings. All sufferings and pains are in themselves evils, and it is God’s will that we should avoid them, so far as is consistent with his justice and truth. Of course, if in opposition to his

word, we bring sufferings upon ourselves or others, we dishonour God, so far as any creature can dishonour him. So in like manner, a state or kingdom, which makes good and just laws, is honoured in punishing those who violate them; but the criminal dishonouring his country in committing the crimes for which he suffers; and as regards himself and his own moral character, his sufferings are a disgrace to his country. So the fallen angels, though God is honoured in the justice of their punishment, do not honour God, as they who “have kept their first estate.” And in the case of those wicked men who have their portion, as our Lord says, with “the devil and his angels,” God had revealed to them his righteous laws; he had set before them a blessing and a curse; and after they were sinners, he had given them a Saviour, and offered them pardon and life in Jesus Christ; he enlightened them with his word; he called them in his gospel; admonished them by his ministers; and constrained them with his grace; but they slighted his mercies, violated his laws, and would none of his reproof. God is honoured in their just punishment; yet in the conduct for which they are punished, they dishonoured God; and as a consequence, and as regards themselves, their sufferings dishonour God. He has sworn by himself, the most tremendous of all oaths, “As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but rather that the wicked turn from his ways and live.”

Here then, you can see the mistake of those who may believe or teach that none can be saved, except they are first willing to be damned; except they are willing to suffer endless misery for the glory of God.

Every sincere penitent knows and feels, and acknowledges that it would be just in God to condemn him; and he feels willing to submit to God's government, and to hear patiently any evils, that he may be restored to God's favour and escape the wrath to come. But we should consider, that to lose our souls and perish for ever, as concerns our own conduct, which is the question, is not, as we have shown, glorifying, but dishonouring God. For our souls cannot be lost, but by our living in opposition to God's laws, by continuing in a state of sin and impenitency. To be willing, therefore, to perish, is to oppose God's will; for "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" to be willing to perish, is to be at enmity with God; it is to unite with satan against God's kingdom. The notion of being willing to be damned for God's glory, is indeed an absurdity; it is the same as continuing in sin for the honour of God; it is dishonouring God to promote his glory.

But they who talk in this way must deceive themselves. No man in his right senses, is, or can be willing to endure the eternal wrath of God. The stupidity of sinners may not realize the terrors of "eternal judgment;" fools may mock at sin, and make light of what the scriptures teach of future punishment; but they who are truly awakened, will fear and tremble. Some, indeed, who are taught to believe that this is necessary to a true conversion, may be brought to say, and perhaps even to believe, that they are willing to be condemned to endless misery; - yet can you believe that they would not prefer life to death, happiness to pain? Can any

person who hates sin and loves God, be indeed willing to take his portion with apostate spirits, and blaspheme God through endless ages? We cannot suppose it. Men may declare it; they may be persuaded that they have this willingness; but it must be in some qualified sense, or in some mistaken view of being resigned to God, and seeking his glory; and it must, in the nature of the case, be mingled with a strong hope that they shall not perish, which preserves them from all distressing fears.

Still, however, is it true that God's glory should be the ruling object in a Christian's heart; and his loving kindness should we esteem better than life itself. We should be sensible that God is more to be desired than heaven; and his displeasure should we more dread than the punishment of sin. But I say, and repeat, that the desire to be saved, and to dwell with him for ever, is perfectly consistent with our loving him supremely, and the most sincere and ardent desire to do him honour. Selfishness we know, is in its nature sinful. But what is selfishness? It is to regard only our own interest, as it is opposed to, or distinguished from the interest of others; it is shown in all our intercourse with men, and has regard to the things of this world. But in the work of our salvation, there is no competition, or clashing of interests. In Jesus Christ all fulness dwells, there is no rivalry in his arms. In our heavenly Father's house there is bread enough, and to spare. In striving ever so much to work out your own salvation, you will not diminish or obstruct the interest, or the good of any other person; but, on the contrary, you will promote the interest of others; the way in which

only you can save yourself, is by renouncing selfishness, and doing all manner of good to your fellow men. The more you endeavour to "save yourself," the more will you honour God, and be free from selfishness. Our blessed Saviour in his discourses, very frequently and very much encourages his disciples to look, and hope, and strive for a blessed reward in a future state. And though he requires us to leave all, and to hate all for his sake, he means it evidently in that sense only, in which the things and the people of this world are opposed to God, and hinder us in our Christian race. In no other sense may we hate or leave our relatives and friends. Our duty is to love all men, and to love them the more for Christ's sake. Indeed, where our Saviour speaks of the utmost self-denial, such as cutting off a hand, or plucking out an eye, he encourages us with the hope of a reward; "It is better for you to enter into life, having one hand, or one eye, than having two, to be cast into hell fire." And he promises, by his apostle, to render eternal life to those who, "by patient continuance in well doing, seek for honour, glory, and immortality." And all Christians are encouraged to "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as they know that their labour is not in vain in the Lord."

But we need not longer dwell on a point so clear. If there be any thing like a sinful selfishness in religion, it consists in bigotry and uncharitableness, and sectarianism; in striving, by unchristian means, to exalt our own-favourite sect, and to put down others; in attempting to bar the gates of salvation against those

who think differently from ourselves; in making our own notions and opinions the measure of truth and the standard of orthodoxy, not duly considering that all men are liable to err, and we no less than others. We are guilty of selfishness or something worse, if we attempt to injure other churches in their character and prosperity, by misrepresenting their worship, or doctrines, or discipline, or by any other means.

Let us not then, draw any wrong inferences from our text. This apostle does not teach, nor do the scriptures any where teach, that seeking the salvation of God, is any way inconsistent with living to his glory. The scriptures no where teach, that they who would flee from the wrath to come, must first be willing to endure that wrath. They no where teach that an awakened and constant desire to be justified in Christ and to live with God, is a sinful selfishness. Nor does St. Paul in the text, mean that God's glory must be the immediate motive of every act of our lives, which is a thing impossible. He has here taught us, rather to honour God by doing what we can to promote our own and others' salvation. And especially in things which are neither commanded nor forbidden, that we so conduct, as not to offend others, nor hinder their salvation. The love of God, and a desire to do his will, and to cause others to reverence and adore his name, should, as far as is possible, be kept constantly in our view. In things indifferent, that is, which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the word of God, we must so practice, as not to violate the rule of charity; not to give needless offence; not to encourage others to sin, nor to let our good be evil spoken of. In performing the

duty enjoined in our text, very much depends on times and circumstances. We must regard the weakness, and the ignorance, and even the prejudices of our Christian brethren. As St. Paul says, in his fourteenth chapter to the Romans, where he treats most excellently and fully on this subject, "Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself, in that which he alloweth." Things which are lawful, may not be expedient. Like St. Paul, let us endeavour to please all men, not by flattery, or by violating any of the principles of Christianity, but by yielding to their infirmities, by avoiding needless offence, and by being ever willing, for the truth's sake, to give up every thing besides.

In a Christian's life will be many questions respecting conformity to the world, and what things are allowed in the word of God. It is wise to be on the safe side, and if the things are of a doubtful nature, to avoid them. And in many instances, when "we have faith," we had better "keep it to ourselves;" that is, if we are "fully persuaded in our own mind" that the things in question are lawful; yet, if to do them will offend others who think them unlawful, it is according to the rule of Christian charity, and it is honouring God, to refrain from them.

But we are in great danger of dividing ourselves in questions of this sort, and under the notion of Christian liberty, to indulge in love of the world. Too much is often comprehended in our notions of harmless pleasures and innocent amusements. Those which are indeed such, which are really harmless, and have no evil tendency to waste our time, corrupt

the heart, nor interfere with the more serious concerns of life, may safely be followed. But the great danger is, of being "lovers of pleasures, more than lovers of God." What is chiefly to be lamented is, that Christians should so love the world, as to plead for its vanities; that God's people should loathe the manna he gives them, and long for the luxuries of Egypt; that we should ever conceive that there is more pleasure in what are justly called worldly vanities, than in things most excellent, and of infinite importance; that Christians, who have chosen so good a part, should find more delight in trivial things, than in those of infinite concern. We are often asked, if Christians are to be debarred of all amusements; if they must be cloistered from all intercourse with the world, and not be allowed the enjoyments of life? We ask, in return, if there are no pleasures in religion? If there is nothing delightful in serving God; in contemplating his character, his goodness, and his promises, and doing good to our fellow men? Must the disciple of Jesus Christ, who has renounced the world; who is seeking immortal glory; and whose conversation should be in heaven, go to the world, and even to the most foolish things of the world, for pleasure and amusement? Are we then lovers of worldly pleasures, more than lovers of religion? In many cases it is not so much the evil nature of worldly amusements that we regret, as that Christians should love them. As our apostle says, "The idol is nothing;" it is your desire to worship the idol, that is of the most serious concern. What we fear, and what every Christian should be aware of, is the unsanctified affection of the heart drawing it from God

to the world. If we truly love God and seek his glory, the ways of religion will be ways of pleasantness, and to do good our greatest delight.

And in this chiefly, in doing good, let us seek and delight to honour God. If we are the disciples of Christ, like him must we go about doing good, and promoting the happiness and salvation of our fellow men. "Let then your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

And to our Father who is heaven, be ascribed eternal praise. Amen.

SERMON XI.



THE REASONS AND THE REMEDY OF RELIGIOUS MELANCHOLY.

Psalm xlii. 5.

*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou dis-
quieted in me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him
for the help of his countenance.*

THESE words of king David, uttered under the pressure of some heavy affliction, probably when driven from his kingdom, and the holy hill of Zion, by the rebellion of his son Absalom, afford much comfort to Christian mourners, and to those especially, whose minds are dejected with religious melancholy. The loss of his kingdom, and of temporal grandeur, seems to have far less affected that monarch, than his exile from the sacred place where the ark rested; his being cast out, as it were, from the Lord's presence. Nature was in him, as in other men, weak; there were seasons when his spirits were much depressed, but he was never in despair. He knew in whom he trusted, a God of refuge, who never forsook a faithful servant. He reproves his own weakness,

in suffering desponding apprehensions to pain his heart; and grace rises in triumph, and comforts his soul with religious consolations. Often did he repeat these words of the text, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" Is not God, who governs the world, just, and wise, and merciful? Shall we receive good at his hands, and shall we not receive evil? Afflictions are sent in love; they are necessary to our better good. I will still hope in his unchanging goodness; I will never cease to trust in his mercy, whose unfailing word is pledged for my support. The happy time will again come, when my soul shall rejoice in the light of his countenance; when I shall praise him for that mercy which endureth for ever.

If a man of David's sound faith, ardent piety, and religious experience, was sometimes beset with such dejection, we may well expect, what is too much the fact, that God's people at other times, that Christians now, should, in many instances, experience the like dejection. The Saviour of the world shed his blood to deliver us from the pains of eternal death; but not from all the sorrows incident to humanity in this present world. It is rather the Lord's will, that through much tribulation we should enter his heavenly kingdom.

And yet, this seems a strange difficulty to many Christians. That impenitent, unbelieving sinners, who are "without God in the world," should have no hope, is not difficult to be supposed. But why should they who believe in Christ, be ever cast down? Why should they who know that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be

compared with the infinite joys which await them in a better state, suffer dejection of spirits, and in many instances be less cheerful, and appear less happy than worldly men? Why should they, who have once “tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,” ever seem to doubt the certainty of his word, and suffer the pains and disappointments of this life to cast them down? Nothing, the Christian well knows, can be more sure than the word and promises of God; heaven and earth will sooner pass away, than his covenant fail. That the dead will be raised to life, is made to us no less certain, than that it is appointed unto all men once to die; and that there is a reward for the righteous in heaven, is not less sure, than that they have sorrows, or that they have existence here on the earth. But it does not follow that men must of course have the same lively and undoubting assurance of spiritual things, as of sensible objects. The evidence of our senses is more powerfully convincing, than that of our reason and understanding. In the one case, we walk by sight; in the other, by faith only. What we know by the testimony of our senses, we cannot doubt of. “That which we see by the light of grace, though it is indeed more certain, and our reason must so acknowledge, yet the evidence is not so necessarily convincing to our imperfect understandings.”

Let it be remembered too, that spiritual light is given men in various portions, and different degrees, according to the very different states and trials to which it has pleased God to call us. Some indeed, have ten talents; others have but five; and some but one. We have reason to believe, that the principal

circumstance in the moral probation of many, not to say the most of people, may be the obscurity of the evidence given, or the doubts which are permitted to perplex them. The fruits of faith and holiness are required, and are accepted, "according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

Let it also be considered, that none are perfect; that all fall short of what is justly required, and that our best deeds have need of pardon. Our faith, compared with what it should be, is weak when we are confident; and a sense of this weakness, is often our best security. He, who without any "fear and trembling," thinks that he stands secure, ought more than other men, to "take heed lest he fall." And let every one take heed how he boasts of, or confides in a strength which he does not possess, lest he should lose the support of that weakness, which in common with all men, he certainly has.*

But this is a subject of such general interest, and is so connected with our religious practice, that it claims our more particular attention. And it is intended, as the Lord shall permit, to offer some remarks upon the cause, the use, and the remedy of the depression of spirits to which Christians are subject.

I. In many cases, melancholy proceeds from bodily weakness, and then what it most needs, is medical relief. Often too, in the constitution or natural temper, there is a disposition to sadness, and to view every thing on the most discouraging side. And

* See Hooker's Sermon on the perpetuity of Faith.

though a faith in Christ has a tendency to correct this, as every other inordinate propensity, and unreasonable disposition, yet the temper will take advantage of this, as of every other human infirmity, to cloud our hopes, and cast us down. Christians of such melancholic temperament, are usually weak in faith, and even religion they will view in the light which is most gloomy and discouraging. They are ready to fear that their hearts have not been renewed; that their repentance is not sincere; and their faith not that which justifies. All the threatenings against sin, they are ready to apply to themselves, and none of the promises in Christ.

2. Another cause of religious discouragement, is a habit which some have, of judging themselves, not from the word of God, but from the words of men. They hear others talk of comforting experience, of rapturous devotions, and sublime enjoyment of religious hope; and because they feel less assurance, are ready to conclude that they have none. This is unreasonable; for others may be too confident and fearless; they may be deceivers, or themselves deceived. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." And supposing that other men are all that they think themselves, or pretend to be, it does not follow that all Christians must be like them. The Lord himself makes one to differ from another; and they who mourn in Zion, may serve him as acceptably, as others who are always rejoicing. We know, and we rejoice that there are many Christians who in this life, especially towards its close, reach to very high degrees of assurance, and leave this world in the most triumphant expectation of a blessed

immortality. But generally strong expressions of undoubting confidence are no sure indications of stability, or of a well grounded faith. St. Peter, of all the chosen apostles, was the most confident, that though he died with his master, he should never deny or forsake him; and yet, within a few hours, he did both.

3. It is also an error, and it is a further cause of religious discouragement, that they who seek God and endeavour to serve him, in some instances, and perhaps we may say generally, form too high expectations of assurance and of comfort. They expect clearer revelations of divine things; brighter evidence of their justification, and greater joy in the Holy Ghost, than is promised them in this present world. In our teaching, there are few things that we find more difficult, than to make Christians realize that the church here is militant; that this is a state of trial and warfare; and that we are now contending for the prize, not enjoying it. Thousands seem to expect, that the moment they forsake the world, they shall be in paradise; that if they believe, no doubt can assail them; that they shall immediately be, what the most faithful Christians can scarcely in a whole life attain; even what St. Paul was, when he had finished his course, and was ready to be offered; or what the psalmist was in the brightest seasons of religious comfort. They forget through what "fight of afflictions," what manifold and great tribulations, those faithful servants of God had passed; they forget how often the soul of David was cast down, and his heart disquieted within him. The consequence of this error is, that some whose minds the Lord has

truly awakened; whose hearts are warmed with the fire from his holy altar; whose desire is to be found faithful; to be wholly sanctified and accepted with him; yet, because they are not what they wish to be, and what they erroneously suppose a true Christian immediately must be, durst not profess to be what they truly are, sincere believers. That which is the best evidence of their conversion, their penitence, their humility, their fear to offend God, they construe as the contrary, and make it a cause of discouragement. Because faith does not yet effect in them all that it ever has effected, they judge themselves yet faithless. If God does not fill them with all "joy in believing," they refuse to receive any. As well might a man conceive that he does not belong to the human race, because he possesses not every limb and faculty in perfection, which some men enjoy.

4. Another cause of discouragement, or deep concern in Christians who have been for some time disciples, is the advancement which they have made in spiritual knowledge. They obtain a more perfect knowledge of God; they discover more and more the purity of his law, the evil of sin, and the depravity of their own natures. They who are recently converted to the gospel faith; whose hearts are comforted, and their souls perhaps enraptured with a view of God's mercy in Jesus Christ, too seldom sit down to count the cost of their profession; they rejoice with too much confidence, because they are too ignorant of themselves, and know not how deceitful and desperately wicked their heart is. But after some experience of their many infirmities; after sometime enduring the conflict of the Christian war-

fare; when they know that they are set in the midst of manifold and great temptations, and feel how easily many sins beset them; that when they would do good, evil is present with them; and that in every thing they fall short of what the law requires, they are humbled with penitence and sorrow. In cases not a few, they begin to doubt whether they have passed from death unto life. Every succeeding year they appear to themselves more sinful, and less worthy, than in years past. They think more also, of how much is at stake, and what it is to lose their souls. The magnitude of eternity is rising on their view. They find now, that the righteous scarcely are saved; and that their own salvation must be "wrought out with fear and trembling." Experienced Christians become like a man bearing a great treasure; the more he discovers its value, the more awakened are his apprehensions of losing it.

5. There is also a plain distinction between the doubting of unbelief, and the doubting which is through infirmity; as there is also between the sins of infidels, and of weak believers. The other often err, and may fall into great sins; but they never yield themselves the servants of iniquity, nor are they contented with their bonds. They find no peace or comfort; their hearts are disquieted within them, till they are fully restored to the liberty of the sons of God; till they behold again his reconciled countenance. The errors of a Christian, and his general conduct in life, are as a line drawn by a trembling hand; though it appear ragged and uneven, the general course is right, and it comes at last to the point where it should end. But the ways of the faithless

and wicked, are as lines drawn in a wrong direction; the farther they extend, the more they err; and when they seem most straight and smooth, deviate the most rapidly from the true point. There is mercy with God, that he should be feared, and men be saved; and a humble spirit, and a contrite heart, though trembling and afraid, he will never despise. Yet many, who, by such view of their sins, are like the psalmist, cast down, will not like him be comforted. They feel the wound, but apply not the remedy. They mourn the want of divine grace, when it is powerfully striving with them. They lament the loss of what they actually possess; are quite discouraged at the hardness of their heart, when it is actually melting by the mercies of God. They think that they have no faith, because some doubts still perplex them; that because they have no perfection, they have no true religion. If I were renewed in heart, (they say,) should I be thus? so cold in my affections to God? so unthankful to my Redeemer? so forgetful of his love? so unlike him in my living? so inclined to evil? so in love with the world? They forget that their grieving for these things is an evidence that their hearts are opposed to them. We ought not to despise the day of small things, but believe that he who has begun a good work in us, is able and willing to finish it. Though evil is present with you, yet if you would do good, you shall be delivered from the body of this death. "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." When the Christian's heart is thus depressed, he should say, "This

is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will consider what he has done for me and for others.

II. The Christian will be more inclined, and better prepared to improve from these trials of religious depression, if he consider also their use. They are profitable

For the trial of your faith. It is good for us, as Christians, no less than as men, to be sometimes afflicted, brought low, and made to be humble. It is much better that we should often, with the publican, be reduced to cry, God be merciful to me a sinner; than to be always like the pharisee, thanking God that we are not as other men. "The Lord would have those who walk in the light, never forget what it is to sit in darkness and the shadow of death. A grieved spirit is the best foundation of a faithful heart."

2. These desponding apprehensions are a sovereign remedy for self-righteousness and spiritual pride. They who think themselves righteous, and in a sure and perfect way to heaven, are likely to be vainly confident, and to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. When you are brought more and more to feel yourself an unworthy, and perhaps a perishing sinner; when you find that your best deeds are far short of perfect righteousness; that if you are saved, it must be of God's free mercy and grace; that in yourself is no spiritual health, you will naturally cease to think highly of your own merits; you will make no claim of salvation for any

thing that you do; the doctrine of justification by faith will be not only your belief; but your only hope and comfort. Again,

3. By this depression of spirits, to which good men are subject, you are taught how little confidence can be placed in your religious feelings, or the state of your passions. When your soul is in raptures, you may be in a dangerous state; when you are depressed and discouraged, the Lord may be nearest to aid and bless you. There is an ebb in the tide of human passions; the higher they flow, the lower and the sooner they are likely to subside. They whose love to God is sometimes raised to joyful exultations, may, at other seasons, become dull, and without spiritual enjoyment. Now, perhaps you are ready to go to prison and to death with Jesus; and perhaps next year, you will be tempted to deny, or to forsake him. One day, like the psalmist, your heart is elated with a view of the divine perfections; your soul has a longing to enter into the courts of the Lord; your heart and your flesh rejoice in the living God. One day in his courts, is better than a thousand spent in worldly pursuits. But soon, perhaps, you will sink into the deep mire, and the waters will come over your soul. Soon your spirit may cleave to the dust, and you will go mourning all the day long. At one season, we see people much awakened to spiritual things, and flowing into the church, like doves to their windows. Like Israel of old, they gladly quit the pleasures of Egypt, and rejoice to serve God in the wilderness. But a few months elapse, and their hearts turn back; though in their Father's house is

enough and to spare; though the manna daily falls around them, and they may feed on angels' food, the eye of discontent is turned again to the world, and they "would fain feed on the husks which the swine do eat." You may one while seem to be more favoured of God than any other mortal, and ere long be disposed to complain that you are cast out from the light of his countenance. This is our infirmity; we are subject to these changes, but God is ever the same. This teaches you, his dealings certainly ought to teach us all, that our mental feelings, or animal affections, are but a very doubtful criterion of our religious state. They are no certain evidence of your acceptance with God, nor of the progress which you have made towards Christian perfection. We may hope as much from him who mourns in Zion, as from him who rejoices. In a spiritual sense, it is sometimes "better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting."

III. "Let us then hear the conclusion of the whole matter:" What is the remedy for this dejection? How ought the Christian, when his spirits thus sink, to demean himself? Do as the psalmist did; do as he has taught you in our text; put your trust in God. How far religious sorrow may be profitable for you; how far necessary, he only knows. It seems to us more desirable to rejoice in the Lord, than to mourn his absence. But this he best knows, and in him confide. Say to your soul when cast down, "Hope thou in God." With confidence believe, that if you are patient and submissive, if you do not sin nor

charge God foolishly, he will make the affliction work for your good; that you shall still "praise him for the help of his countenance."

In every trial we may sin; when prosperous, we may be vainly confident; when cast down, we may be too soon dejected or too much discouraged. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" but an overwhelming fear may lead to despondence. Let the fire consume the sacrifice, but not him who offers it. Your merits you may leave behind; but fear not to bring your sins before God.

With the most of you there will be seasons when your spirits sink; when zeal is languid; devotions are dull; and the wandering thoughts can scarcely be formed into prayer. Yet cease not to pray; the Spirit makes your tremulous groans prevailing supplications, and intercedes for you. God hears you, when unable to speak; he understands those thoughts which to you seem all confusion; and when you seem to fail in prayer, your prayers may be well accepted, through Him, who is touched with the feelings of your infirmities. When you seem to yourself to have no faith, in the Lord's view your faith may be most alive. Mourning is a more sure sign of feeling, than rejoicing is. The grief you feel for your hardness, is an evidence that your heart is not of stone, but of flesh. Your earnest desire to be what God requires, is an evidence of a renewed mind. Many who are weak in faith, continue faithful in their weakness, and the Lord is ever with them; the bruised reed he will not break, nor quench the smoking flax. In all these trials, you have a short and plain direction before you; it is to hope still in God. While he

continues unchangeably faithful and true, not to trust in him would be a sin. Often, no doubt, storms in our passions are raised by the adversary against us; let us take heed that they do not drive us on the rocks of despair, and make shipwreck of our faith. They who sin through infirmity, have always an advocate with the Father, whose prayer is, Father, forgive them.

In avoiding one error, be cautious also, not to fall into another. Some cherish melancholy, when they have occasion, and when they ought to rejoice; they reject "the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely." They seem to make a merit of sadness; to suppose that if they "go mourning all the day long," it is a sacrifice with which God is well pleased. But this God has no where promised, nor has he required this at your hands. He would rather that you should rejoice in his comfort, and enjoy his peace; for this we ought to strive.

Let it be considered too, that our want of religious comfort, is sometimes owing to our remaining sins, and it is generally the most safe to consider that such is our own case; that God forsakes us, because we have forsaken him. And remember also, that truly to put your trust in God, you must faithfully do his will. Let your heart, like the dial, be true to the Sun of Righteousness, whether or not he shine upon you. Let his loving kindness which has ever been of old, be the pledge of his future mercies, and your assurance, that he who endureth unto the end, shall certainly be saved. Nothing can separate you from the love of God; let nothing divert you from his fear and service.

SERMON XII.



THE WATERS OF ISRAEL, OR MEANS OF GRACE.

2 Kings, v. 12.

Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?

“THE natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,” nor is it without reluctance and opposition, that human pride submits to his righteousness. And he has shown his wisdom, and exposed our folly, in “choosing the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and weak things to confound the things which are mighty; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

In the portion of sacred history, with which this text is connected, we have a lively and impressive view of the nature and efficacy of the means of grace; and there are few passages in the holy scriptures which are better calculated to strengthen our faith

in the word of God, and the use of religious ordinances.

“Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and honourable.” Such a character high in authority, extensively known, and much respected, was the rather chosen, that the Lord’s work wrought upon him, might be the more conspicuous; the light was thus hung on high, that it might shine in a wider circle. As our Lord observes to the Jews, “many lepers were in Israel, in the time of Eliseus (or Elisha) the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.” Not all his honours and terrestrial magnificence, can secure him or any one from the evils of life, nor make him the less dependent upon God. This man, so great and honourable, was a leper; he was afflicted with a malady the most loathsome and incurable.

But the Lord, to whom belong mercies and forgiveness, conducts the blind, by a way they know not, into marvellous light. “The Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel, a little maid, and she waited on Naaman’s wife. And she said unto her mistress, would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria; for he would recover him of his leprosy.” This confidence of the young damsel, in the power of the prophet Elisha, and several instances which perhaps she related of the wonders which in God’s name he had wrought, induced Naaman to make the experiment.

But the attempt, as we might expect, was accompanied with much human pride and a vain show.

He first applied to the king of Israel, who was quite disconcerted, and forced to acknowledge his inability to perform such a work; but was soon relieved from his embarrassment, by the goodness of Elisha, "who sent to the king, saying, wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Naaman went with his chariot in great style, "and stood before the house of Elisha," expecting that the prophet would salute him with accustomed reverence and respect. But to correct his error, and teach him how worthless in God's sight is all the pomp of human pride, Elisha did not even go out of his house to salute or to meet him; but simply "sent a messenger unto him, saying, go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

These were certainly good tidings, and he ought to have received them with great joy. But on the contrary, he received this message with indignation. Forgetting that he had come, not to be flattered, but to be healed; not to dictate, but obey, his pride was incensed by this seeming disrespect. Wash seven times in Jordan! What benefit could he expect from such simple means? Or, what virtue is there in the number seven, that once washing may not suffice; or what excellence in the waters of Jordan, that it should be thus distinguished from other streams? What followed was very natural; "he was wroth, and went away, and said, I thought surely he will come out to me, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana, and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of

Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" No, proud man, the rivers of Damascus will profit you nothing. You must submit to God's righteousness; you must wash in Jordan, or remain a leper. To this his pride at first would not submit. He had determined in his own mind, how the prophet ought to conduct this business, and effect the cure; and when the man of God took a different course, and proposed means which appeared so contemptible, "he turned and went away in a rage."

It was happy for this man, that he had servants, whose views of this matter were more correct and reasonable. "My father," said they, "if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean!" He was so wise as to hearken to this good advice; "he went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, and his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." This astonishing result, filled him with gratitude and admiration; he returned to the man of God, with expressions of the utmost reverence for the Lord Jehovah; he now acknowledges his full belief, that the God of Israel is the only true God, and declares his determination for the future, to worship no other deity.

But how critical, and how perilous was his situation at that awful moment, when with such indignation and rage, he turned away from the Lord's prophet! Suppose his servants had not ventured to advise him; or, (what many would have done,) that he had treated their suggestion with contempt; suppose that he had returned in that temper to his

own country, what would have been the natural consequence? He not only would have continued a loathsome leper through the remainder of his wretched life, but (which is infinitely worse,) he would have been confirmed in unbelief; he would have blasphemed the name of the true God, and would have hated and persecuted his prophets. Elisha would have been deemed an impostor, and his professions and prophecies, hypocrisy and priestcraft. Happily, indeed, he escaped this dreadful result, by hearkening to good advice.

We have our Saviour's authority for making religious improvement from this history of "Naaman the Syrian." Nothing could be better calculated to show us the unreasonableness and peril of rejecting God's word, and also to teach us the nature and efficacy, and importance of the appointed means of grace. The practical inferences which crowd upon the mind, are so many and so important, that the difficulty is in making a selection.

From the example of this "young maid" in Naaman's family, we might make many remarks on the advantages of giving children a religious education, and of having in your families, pious, conscientious domestics, who will truly regard your interest, do you real good, and bring a blessing upon your house.

2. From Naaman's leprosy, let us reflect on the worse malady of the soul, from which no fortune in life, nor temporal honours, can secure us. This is a leprosy which none but God himself can heal and change. And to the great physician, to the true prophet, the Saviour Christ, must all resort, whether high or low, who would be restored to spiritual health.

3. Observe too, with what weak and humble instruments, the Lord does his work. To the most skilful professor and mighty men of the earth, had Naaman applied in vain; a feeble captive in the state of a servant, was the first to put him in a way to find relief. And how forcibly does this bring to our view the first preaching of the gospel; the humble instruments chosen of God to show men the way of salvation, and teach the doctrines of eternal life! For four thousand years, had men looked in vain to the philosophers and wise men of the earth, for spiritual light, and peace with God; the leprosy continued. They were wise in their generation; but in religion, in the knowledge of God, their heart was darkened, and professing to be wise, they became fools. A knowledge of that salvation which is of God, flesh and blood could not reveal. And when in fulness of time, the Lord was pleased in mercy to make known the mystery of redemption in Jesus Christ, it was a revelation that confounded the wise, and humbled the pride of man; it required the mighty of the earth to condescend to men of low degree, and hearken to "the foolishness of preaching." Apostles chosen from the humble ranks of life, were commissioned to direct mankind to the great physician; to the man of God, and Son of man, "who taketh away the sins of the world."

How simple were the means by which Naaman was cleansed. There was no natural efficacy in the waters of Jordan to cure the leprosy. But the Lord can save by many or few; his word is life; if he but speak the word, we are made whole. All means are effectual, if they have his blessing. He can make

what men deem "foolish things," subservient to the noblest ends. "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom," but God does, what to them seems foolishness; he sends his messengers, his ministers, to tell you what you must do to be saved. He does not bid you do some great thing whereby you may obtain honour for yourself; he does not, as men require, come out and strike his hand over the place; he does not give the sign which they demand, nor conform at all to human wisdom; he tells you, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved."

4. But Naaman despised such simple means as washing in Jordan; and many are they who sin after the same example of unbelief. Many turn away from a preached gospel, and neglect the great salvation offered them in Jesus Christ, because it is not according to their wisdom. In the same spirit, and sometimes nearly in the very language of this Syrian leper, do men despise the ordinances of Christ. The doctrine that "outward and visible signs," though "ordained by Christ himself," should be accompanied with "inward and spiritual grace," gives offence. The Christian ordinances appear to many, as needless and as contemptible, as Jordan's waters did to the Syrian chief. That they who ask shall receive; that the "bread and wine which the Lord has commanded to be received," should in any sense, be his body and blood; or, that any religious rites should be accompanied with God's spiritual benediction, is to some a stumbling-block, and to others foolishness. They think it enough that men should be taught good morals, without enjoining such simple, and (they think,) useless ceremonies.

The Jews expected the Messiah; but when he came to his own, they received him not. And why did they not receive him? Because his humble appearance, and his spiritual doctrines, did not comport with their expectations; because he did not give them the sign which they required. They thought surely that he would come out to them; that his advent, and his kingdom, would be according to their corrupt and unreasonable anticipations. The same pride and corruption still appertain to our nature. Many reject Christianity, and not a few pervert, or explain away its doctrines, because in its purity, it makes foolish their wisdom, and condemns their practice. Our disposition to exalt our reason in opposition to God's word, and our wills against his precepts, is more powerful and more extensive, than we are aware of. Thousands, who name themselves of Christ, will not receive his religion, except as it agrees with what they are pleased to call a rational system. From creeds and doctrines, especially those of the cross, they turn away in a rage. Is not (they virtually say) the death of Paul, or of Peter, as meritorious as the cross of Christ? May not their blood as well wash away our sins?

The ministers of Christ may well reason with men, as did Naaman's servants with their master. Had the Lord bid you do some great thing, would you not do it? What sacrifice could be too great, or what duties too laborious for such "exceeding great reward," as that promised to the believer? Did the Saviour call you to relinquish every enjoyment of life; if, like Moloch's votaries, you must offer your children in sacrifice; or, like the slaves of vice, en-

gage in the most absurd, laborious, and destructive pursuits; who would hesitate to do this for acceptance with God, and immortal life? How much rather then, should you embrace his gospel, when the Saviour's yoke is easy, and the burden light; when he saith unto you, look and be healed; "wash and be clean;" "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!" What the gospel requires as necessary to eternal life, is simple and easy to be performed; it is perfectly reasonable and just, and tends to the best good of ourselves and others, even in this present life. Happy will it be, if like Naaman, you are at length wise; if you dismiss your pride, and hearken to the advice of those who are "your servants, for Jesus' sake." But many, very many, we may fear, are the wretched souls who turn away from their Saviour, despising what they call the foolishness of preaching, and continue in the same temper, till they are called to the eternal world. You see here, the danger and the folly of opposing a vain philosophy to the word of God.

5. You may learn also, from these scriptures, the right use of appointed means. Not that you are to place any reliance upon mere forms or ceremonies. What is essential, and what we should chiefly desire is, that faith in Christ which renews the heart, which so engages the affections of the soul, as to excite in us a detestation of sin, and a sincere desire to live to God and to do his will. It should also be well considered, that there is nothing meritorious in the performance of religious rites. For coming to baptism, or confirmation, or the Lord's supper, we are not to suppose ourselves better men; rather a right use of

those ordinances will cause us to feel ourselves less worthy, and to be more penitent and humble. There was nothing meritorious in Naaman's dipping in Jordan. It was ordered as a test of his faith; and it is "written for our learning;" to encourage us likewise to confide in God's word, not doubting, but that the blessings which are promised, will in the due time, be fulfilled. All the positive ordinances of Christianity, are in like manner trials of our faith; and we are to perform them, not as mere ceremonies, but as a public manifestation before the world, that we believe what God has taught, and that we trust in the Saviour whom he has sent us. These of course, are privileges in which we should rejoice and be thankful; but still, if we rightly view them, they will increase our humility. They are the evidence, not of our righteousness, but of that faith, which teaches and makes us feel that we are sinners, totally underserving of such goodness. A right use of the sacraments, causes us to feel as did the penitent prodigal when even in his father's arms; "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." We are assured, indeed, of God's favour and acceptance, but we know it is in consequence, not of our merits, but of our faith in his free mercy and grace.

Of course, the outward act, without such faith, is wholly useless. Without such faith, the sacraments are no evidence to us that we are pardoned and accepted of God; but on the contrary, they show that we are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. None, indeed, but they who are great hypocrites, or very ignorant of religion, will use them without faith.

But they, who, like Naaman, are sensible that the leprosy is on them, and that they need a physician more than human; they, who with awakened solicitude, are inquiring what they shall do to be saved, are the people likely to be profited by our present subject. You, who as sinful, dying creatures, would fly to God for refuge; you, who desire that your minds may be renewed, your affections sanctified, and your souls saved, may truly profit by the use of appointed means. If you ask in this way, you shall receive; knock thus, with a sincere heart and an humble faith, and it shall be opened unto you. Pride and self-righteousness, will tell you that "the rivers of Damascus are better than the waters of Israel." But a right use of your reason, will teach you to seek God in the way of his own appointment, and by the means which he has ordained. If with "an honest and good heart," you hear the word preached, you may hope that it will be inwardly grafted in your hearts, and make you wise unto salvation. If you faithfully ask in prayer, the Lord will hear and grant your requests; his word is pledged, and he is faithful. They who are "born of water," who receive "the outward and visible sign" of baptism; if they have "repentance, whereby they forsake sin; and faith, whereby they steadfastly believe the promises of God made to them in that sacrament," shall receive "the inward and spiritual grace;" shall be "born of the Spirit;" their sins shall be forgiven, and they shall be "called the sons of God."

And you too, who with the like faith come to confirmation, desirous to ratify your baptismal vow, and renew your engagements to believe and to live as

faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, shall receive God's heavenly benediction, and the strengthening of his Holy Spirit, to work in you, both to will and to do, what is according to his holy word. And if you devoutly partake of the Lord's supper, you may humbly hope for the spiritual refreshment of Christ's body and blood; it will be to you also, an "assurance of his favour and goodness, and that you are members incorporate in the mystical body of his Son, (or that invisible church,) which is the blessed company of all faithful people." And generally, if your hearts be sincere; if you are no dissemblers with God; if you seek in earnest for his pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, and seek in that way which he directs, you will not seek in vain.

Let us then, in this way, reverence and use the waters of Israel, trusting in the promise of God, "which he for his part, will most surely keep and perform." Make no merit of your performance; "circumcision is nothing, but a new creature." The true doctrine, as we have seen, is that a pious use of appointed means, in obedience to God's word, and reliance upon his promise, shall be blest to our spiritual benefit. They are a test of your faith, to try whether you are the spiritual children of Abraham. You are to observe them as a declaration of your belief in God's word, of your obedience to his command, and of your trust in your Saviour. When you approach him as God's prophet, and the only physician of your soul, he directs you to the healing waters of his sanctuary; to the seals of his covenant; to the pale of his church. The act of faith is an assurance of our acceptance. Naaman was cleansed

by the power of God; but not till he had washed in Jordan. So the blind man, who, as Christ commanded, washed in the pool of Siloam, returned seeing. God might as well save without means; but for wise purposes, he thus exercises our trust in his word. The ordinances of Christ are the appointed channels, through which, generally speaking, he pours out his Spirit, and dispenses his grace. If we ever use them without profit, it must be because we use them not according to his word. He knows our heart, and with what intentions we approach him.

This history of Naaman abounds, then, with instruction to all who desire to be Christians; and to use the language of his handmaid, "I would to God" that such were the desire of every one who has a soul to be saved. Were you with this true prophet, the Lord from heaven, he would cure you of the leprosy. "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as wool." There is no other name given whereby you can be saved. Believest thou that he is able to do this thing, to cleanse you from sin and to save your soul? Do you, indeed, with awakened concern seek for his salvation? Then must you follow his directions. He is Lord as well as Christ; not only a prophet, but a king. "Why," he asks, "do ye call me Lord, and do not the things which I command?"

Let us also be aware of the pride and self-righteousness which so easily beset us. The Lord effects our salvation by weak instruments, to make us humble, and to show that the work is his. Be cautious how you turn with dislike from the doctrines of Christ, and the means of grace, because they are not accord-

ing to your wisdom; rather justify his wisdom, and throw yourself wholly upon his mercy, claiming nothing as due to yourself, and thankful, if on any terms, and by any means, you may obtain pardon and justification. Lean not to your own understanding; indulge in no captious objections against Christianity, as though you could have been more wise, or more merciful than God. Think not to dispute every inch of ground which you yield to the Almighty. If you find the leprosy upon you; if you are destitute of spiritual health; if you cannot be justified for your own righteousness; if you are indeed convinced that in case you are saved, it must be not by your merits, but by the grace of God, then let his mercy be your trust, and his word your guide. Expect not that Omniscience should be conformed to your wisdom; that God must come out to you, and cure the leprosy in your way. Carefully avoid that most dangerous, and not uncommon presumption, of modelling Christianity to your taste; of making the scriptures speak the language which you approve, and reducing the doctrines of the infinite Jehovah to the standard of your reason. It is of very little importance, whether or not the institutions of Christ are such as you should have appointed. He who is infinitely wise and good, will not appoint useless ordinances; and he is able to make any means effectual. If he choose things which to you seem “weak” and “foolish,” it is to honour himself in your faith and submission.

You are taught in our subject, the sufficiency of your Saviour. All the ends of the earth are exhorted to look unto him and be saved. Look unto him as the author, and also as the finisher of your faith.

Our faith is finished by the right use of his appointed means. We are edified and strengthened by religious ordinances; you are authorized to hope that God will bless you the rather for your walking as he directs, and doing what he commands. Consider religious rites as inestimable privileges, and endeavour to feel duly grateful for such sanctified tokens of his mercy and grace, which are so kindly adapted to your need. Observe them, not only in obedience to his authority, but also from a sense of your weakness, and from faith in his word. If Christ is the only physician who can restore us to spiritual health, his prescriptions certainly are to be observed. If he has a kingdom or church on earth, we should seek for it as a pearl of great price, and enter it as a city of refuge. If he has appointed men to be ministers of his word, and dispensers of his grace, true faith will teach you, for Christ's sake, to receive them. If any sacraments and other religious rites are ordained as channels of his power and pledges of his favour, them must you receive, not despising them as small things, or useless rites. Would you not "do some great thing," the greatest indeed possible for so good a friend, and so great a prize?

Finally, we are here taught to persevere. Naaman was to wash seven times. Had he done this once only, or twice, or even six times, and no more, there is no reason for supposing that he would have been cleansed. So "he that endureth unto the end, shall be saved." We are commanded to run with patience the race that is set before us; it is our part to submit it to God's unerring wisdom and good pleasure, what shall be the number and the continuance of

our duties and of our trials. Let us labour in hope, and be not weary in well doing, knowing, that in due time, we shall reap if we faint not; and that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

That we may have wisdom and grace to make due improvement from the light and the means which are bountifully bestowed; that we may ever rightly distinguish, and duly estimate the waters of Israel; and whatever the Lord has ordained, devoutly perform, the same Lord mercifully grant, to our great comfort and peace; and to his glory and praise in Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XIII.



THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM.

Rom. vi. 3, 4.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

THE best things are sometimes the most abused. Even the doctrine of Christ, that grace of God, which bringeth salvation, and which teaches men, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, has been so perverted from its holy purpose, as to encourage men to “live in sin.” St. Paul, as he tells us in the third chapter of this epistle, was accused of Antinomianism; it was slanderously reported, and some affirmed that he said, “Let us do evil, that good may come; let us continue in sin, that grace may abound.” He treats with abhorrence such perversion of the truth, and shows how totally inconsistent is the profession of Christianity

with a wicked life. He has taught the true doctrine of Christ on this subject with such force and perspicuity, and given such reasons why every one who names the name of Christ should “depart from iniquity” and “walk in newness of life,” that he who runs may read, and none but the wilfully blind can misunderstand.

This is true, that in all the chapters preceding this, from which the text is taken, and especially in the one which is immediately before, the apostle teaches, and by powerful argument and luminous illustration, establishes the more essential principles of the gospel, and the most distinguishing doctrines of Christ’s religion; such as justification by faith, and salvation through grace. He shows that salvation is not of works, but is the gift of God. The boasted wisdom of the Greeks, and the descent of the Jews from Abraham, he proves will be equally unavailing, and totally insufficient to the attainment of life immortal; that Abraham was justified by faith, even in that noble and most astonishing act of obedience, the offering of his son Isaac. It is from this most comforting doctrine, our “being justified by faith, that we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “The law entered that the offence might abound,” and men be made sensible how corrupt the heart is. “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound;” through faith in Christ, the most wicked transgressors of the law may obtain pardon, and peace, and life.

In this sixth chapter, St. Paul shows, that in teaching this doctrine of free grace, and of justification by faith, we do not make void the law, nor

lessen its influence upon the lives of men, but rather we establish the law. These doctrines of grace, by exposing the great sinfulness of breaking any the least of God's commandments, and by giving additional and most powerful motives to repentance and a holy life, do indeed establish the law, both in sentiment and practice. No people more strictly, or more conscientiously observe the law, than they who believe that it can never justify us; that by grace we are saved. He here refutes what is so slanderously reported of those who teach this evangelical doctrine; he shows that nothing can be more unjust, than to infer from what the apostles taught, that men may safely live in sin; that the more wicked men are, the more will God be honoured in their pardon and salvation. "What shall we say then?" What just inference may be drawn from the doctrine of free grace? "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" May this pernicious inference be justly drawn? May we with any good reason argue thus? That since we are all sinners, and cannot be saved by our works; seeing that "God has commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," and that we are saved freely by grace, and not by our own works, why may we not reasonably and safely continue in sin, that God may be more honoured in the abounding of his grace? Why not live as we please, in all manner of wickedness, and wholly rely on the mercy of God? If we continue in sin, trusting in his free and sovereign grace, shall we not hereafter sing the louder to his praise? Is not this to practise the doctrine of grace? Is not this to live to the glory of God? To this the apostle

replies with abhorrence, "God forbid" that any one should so pervert his word, and misconstrue his mercy. "How shall we who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" It is a point allowed, that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;" his very profession is, that he has "renounced ungodliness and worldly lusts," and is engaged to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." This faith which justifies, renews the heart; they who possess it, are new creatures; they are dead to sin, and alive to righteousness. As faith is an assurance of their justification, so is their sanctification, or the renewal of their minds, and their deliverance from the dominion of sin, an evidence of their faith; without this, their faith is dead. A good man, a true believer, may sometimes, through the infirmity of his nature, and sudden or powerful temptation, be drawn into acts of sin; but the person who willingly continues in what he knows to be sin, has not that faith of the heart by which "man believeth unto righteousness;" by which the just live, and sinners are saved.

It is strange, as the apostle in our text proceeds to observe, that any Christians should be ignorant of this, the pure nature and holy tendency of the doctrines of grace, when that sacrament, by which they were admitted into the fellowship of the Christian church, signifies this very change of heart. "Baptism represents unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him; that as he died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptized, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness." He supposes it

scarce possible that a Christian should be ignorant of this: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?" Can it be that you have received "the outward, visible sign, or form of baptism," and yet remain ignorant of "what is the inward part or thing signified?" If you have forgotten this, I very seriously remind you, that "we are buried with Christ by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." And do you who have been baptized, do you, who by your own profession "are dead to sin," talk of "continuing longer therein?" Will Christians justify walking unworthy of their vocation? Can they who are sanctified and set apart as "a peculiar people zealous of good works," plead for works of iniquity? When you "were baptized into Jesus Christ;" when the Lord mercifully vouchsafed to give you this token of the remission of your sins, through the shedding of his own blood, what engagements were implied, if not expressed on your part? Certainly that you would "obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life." And how else should they walk, or desire to walk, who are disciples of such a Saviour? What other or less return would we make for such inestimable benefits? Shall the disciples of Jesus again betray him? Would they crucify the Son of God afresh? Again would you hear him cry, in the agonies of death, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Who would think of serving two masters, so totally irreconcilable as sin and the Sa-

viour? “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial?” “How shall they who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” Baptism is the sign of a new birth, the token of our being ingrafted into Christ; of our being translated from the bondage of corruption into the kingdom of grace. If afterwards we voluntarily and of deliberate choice live in sin, we violate the baptismal covenant; we rebel against the Lord who has bought us; we walk unworthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.

In many of the verses following the text, the apostle continues the subject, and confirms this doctrine, “that baptism represents unto us our profession,” which is, that we die with Christ unto sin, and through faith, rise with him to newness of life. This being so clear and incontrovertible, it is intended for our present instruction, to consider more particularly, what in this text is taught us of the mode, and the nature, and the doctrine of baptism.

I. On the first of these points, I should deem it inexpedient to consume your time, were it not that the expression which St. Paul here uses, “buried with Christ by baptism into death,” is supposed by many Christians to have respect to the mode of baptism, and is urged more perhaps than any other text, to prove that the apostles baptized, by burying the person under water; and that this mode is necessary to the right administration of this sacrament. I have no intention in this discourse, of entering upon this controverted question, but merely to prevent a

misunderstanding of the text. It is highly important that the scriptures should be fairly explained and clearly understood, and then may each one judge what are the doctrines of the bible, and what the duties required. In some instances, the unlearned are governed more by the sound of a passage, than by its true sense. When words are used figuratively, as in this instance, we should be cautious how we apply the literal expression for proving any doctrine. It is required of all Christians to be crucified with Christ; but it does not follow that we must be literally nailed to a cross. In Christ we are said to be circumcised; but it is only "with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh." And in like manner, we are said to be buried with Christ by baptism; and neither does this require that we should be literally covered with earth, or laid in a sepulchre, or put under water. And yet, because plunging a person under water, has some little resemblance to burying him under the ground, the two things are naturally associated in the mind, and the imagination is diverted from the metaphorical or spiritual sense and true reasoning of the apostle, to external modes, to visible, material things. From this regard to the sound, or literal sense of this and a few other figurative expressions, we can easily conceive why so many Christians, especially in the ancient and more superstitious ages of the church, should prefer baptism by immersion; it represents to the eye what the word buried, does to the ear. The preference for baptism by immersion, is not indeed objectionable, provided it does not degenerate into superstition; that no

undue importance is attached to this particular mode; and we are sufficiently careful not to number it among things essential.

We may remark further, that baptism is mentioned in the scripture with a like figurative allusion to the pouring out of the divine Spirit, and to the sprinkling, or the washing of Christ's blood; but neither does this prove that sprinkling or affusion is the only lawful mode of baptism. It is evidently left with the church, and with the ministers of Christ, to apply the water in baptism, in whichever of these modes is found most convenient and edifying; and the preference or use of either, ought never to interrupt Christian fellowship and communion.

II. But a better attention to the apostle's reasoning will make it evident, that in these words he has reference to the nature of baptism, and not to the mode of administration. He is showing how inconsistent is living in sin, with the profession and state of a Christian; and the reason he gives is, that they "who are baptized into Jesus Christ, are buried with him into death." Now, if we suppose that by these words he has respect to the mode of baptism, his argument is weak and inconclusive. The circumstance of our having been put under water, does not show, or in any degree prove that sin is inconsistent with our profession; nor that we are bound to keep the commandments of God. If the nature of the Christian covenant; if the stipulation or "the answer of a good conscience towards God," would admit of our living in sin that grace may abound, there would be nothing to the contrary in "the putting away of

the filth of the flesh;" even though we washed, "not our feet only, (as Peter says,) but our hands and our head," even our whole body. To say that we ought not to continue in sin, because we were baptized by immersion, is surely very weak reasoning, if we may call it reason. But the apostle reasons much better; he speaks of the nature, not of the manner of baptism; he refers us not to the outward form, but to "the inward part, or thing signified;" "not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God;" to baptism in the sense in which it "saves us." He speaks of it as the sacrament by which the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are sealed to our comfort. When he says that we are buried with Christ by baptism, he means that in this sacrament "we are made partakers of the death of Christ;" and that we engage, and are laid under the most solemn obligations, in a figurative or spiritual sense, to become "dead to sin, and alive to God through Jesus Christ," and to rise with him to newness of life. In whatever way we may apply the water in baptism, the ordinance represents that blood of sprinkling, by the efficacy of which our sins are washed away, and we are born again; we are baptized for the remission of sins, and into the death of Christ; we are buried with him, not literally in a tomb, but spiritually, by "a death unto sin;" by becoming like the Saviour, holy in our affections. So too we rise with Christ, not literally by coming out of a tomb, or out of water, but "by the renewing of the Holy Ghost;" by imitating the Saviour's example; by "walking in newness of life." Baptism symbolizes the "cir-

cumcision not made with hands;" represents a change in heart and state of life; it signifies that "all sinful affections should die in us; and that all things belonging to the Spirit, should live and grow in us." Being thus through God's grace, "made partakers of the death of Christ," we may hope also, (if we are faithful,) to "be partakers of his resurrection." It becomes not only our duty, but our engagement, to "die from sin, and to rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue and godliness of living." Such is evidently the apostle's meaning, and being so understood, his reasoning is sound and conclusive: It shows that we do not make void the law through faith, but rather establish it. He shows that if we receive the grace of God in vain; if Christians live wickedly, their faith is vain, and their hopes unfounded. "I tell you before," (saith this same apostle,) "as I have also told you in time past, that they who do such things, (as the sins which he had just named,) shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

III. Considering then, the nature of baptism, that it represents "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness;" seeing that it signs and seals to the faithful receiver, the benefits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and lays him under the most solemn obligation to "walk in newness of life;" that it sacramentally admits us into the fellowship of God's people, and makes us visibly "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of his heavenly kingdom," "what manner of persons ought we

to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" It is of the last importance that we should be well grounded in "the doctrine of baptism," which our apostle (to the Hebrews) justly styles one of "the principles of the doctrine of Christ." It is not uncommon with baptized believers, when invited to come to the Lord's supper, to be fearful, because their communion will lay them under solemn obligations to walk as Christians, in the faith of Christ and the fear of God. But they seem to forget the duties resulting from the other sacrament. What obligations can be greater, or what vows more solemn than those of baptism? To what will the Lord's supper bind you, to which you are not already bound who have been baptized? "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?" Know you not, that you are, as far as any sacrament can bind you, "dead to sin," and bound by the highest authority, and by the most reasonable, the most awakening, the most encouraging obligations, to "walk in newness of life?" If baptism does not bind you to this, what can? It is a holy ordinance of your Saviour, appointed for this purpose, to make you the sons of God by adoption, and engage you to live "as obedient children." The Lord's supper is one of the duties it enjoins upon us; "Do this in remembrance of me;" or rather, it is one of the greatest and most blessed of the privileges which baptism confers upon us. Not only worldly people, but Christians are apt too much to view religion only as consisting of duties, obligations, and restraints; to consider Christianity only as a bondage of services; as a yoke that is not easy, and

a burden not light. In our discourses and religious meditations, Christianity is too much considered as legal services and restrictions, to which we submit, in hope of greater good. Christians seem too much to view, as a matter of calculation, what is to be forsaken, and what performed, as if they would decide whether the hopes of heaven are greater than the sacrifice to be made; whether the joys of immortality are likely to be worth what they will cost in the loss of temporal pleasures. But this is dishonouring the grace of God which bringeth salvation. Can we, with such cold calculation, receive the unspeakable gift of a divine Redeemer? Is it thus we value the inestimable privileges of his gospel? We should view the Saviour as our best friend and only hope; the offer of his salvation as good tidings of great joy; his gospel as an invaluable treasure, as a pearl that cannot be estimated at too high a price. His service we should view as the most perfect freedom; and all the duties of religion, as we too often call them, as privileges and our delight. In his merciful goodness has the Lord adapted his religion to our present natures; he has instituted ordinances as the sanctified means of conveying his grace to our souls, and conducting us through life, in his faith and fear. It is not merely our duty; it is our interest, it is our wisdom, and should be our ardent desire, to observe them. If especially we would die to sin, and rise with Christ to life immortal, how should we rejoice to be buried with him, by baptism into death!

This then, practically viewed, is "the doctrine of baptism." First: It is the sign of a new birth. This is clearly the doctrine of our text; and is re-

markably, and in many places, clearly set forth in the articles, and homilies, and other standards of our church, wherein we are fully taught, “that baptism represents unto us our profession;” that the “thing signified” in this sacrament, is “a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.” It teaches us “that as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” This sacrament admits us to inestimable privileges. “For (as St. Paul writes to the Galatians,) “ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ; because, as many of you as have been baptized into Jesus Christ, have put on Christ; and if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to promise.” The same apostle tells the Colossians, “In Christ ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Baptism now signifies, what circumcision formerly did, a change of heart, and a new and holy life; and it admits us into the same covenant of justification through faith in Christ.

2. And we must not forget that this covenant with God through Christ, implies and includes on our part, a solemn “promise and vow,” that we will repent of our sins, believe in our Saviour, and “keep God’s holy will and commandments.” As he who was circumcised was a debtor to do the whole law, so are we who are baptized, bound to obey the gospel.

3. And of course, as the apostle shows, the state of those who are baptized is totally inconsistent with a sinful life. Let us use the utmost caution not to fall into that most pernicious error, that because "being by nature born in sin and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace," we may safely continue in sin, presuming that grace will abound. The Lord abominates such abuse of his mercies, and in his word it is every where condemned. And yet this is an error which very easily besets us. We naturally fall into a notion that our profession goes far to secure our salvation; that the sacraments we receive, and the prayers we offer up, will atone for our transgressions; that because we call Christ Lord, and prophesy, and do wonderful works in his name, we are entitled to his promise. Some think that the inward and spiritual grace of the sacrament, or the thing signified, is inseparably connected with "the outward, visible sign;" that they who are born of water, are of course born of the Spirit; that what is chiefly necessary is, that the sacraments be administered by those who are regularly ordained to that sacred office. But this error the scriptures in many places most clearly condemn. And the church, as a faithful witness no less clearly tells you, that the "sacraments have a wholesome effect or operation in such only as worthily receive them."

Let us endeavour to acquire and preserve right views of this highly important subject. The more enlightened our minds are with "the doctrine of baptism," the more holy will be our lives and the more ardent our zeal to honour our Saviour and be conformed to his image; we shall rejoice to walk in

that newness of life, which baptism represents. Let us endeavour to realize "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God," and be made partakers of such inestimable privileges. Then what cold Christians talk of as duties, and view as self-denial, will be esteemed as blessings and favours. What blessings, what privileges can be greater than prayer, by which we obtain the best things, and the richest blessings; or the Lord's supper, in which we receive that heavenly food, which is strength and life to the soul? Or is it a burden to break off from our sins; from those wicked deeds which are a shame to us; which nailed our Saviour to the cross; and which, if persevered in, will make us everlastingly wretched? Well does an apostle demand of Christians, "What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." By the sacrament which admitted us into the fellowship of Christ's religion, we profess to be crucified to the world, and the world to us; we are supposed to be dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness. How then shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein? That love which the Father hath bestowed upon us, constrains us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and "to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." If we truly love the Saviour, we shall keep his commandments. A grateful sense of God's mercy in Jesus Christ, is the very essence of virtue and goodness. Well does the poet say:

"Talk they of morals? O thou bleeding love,
Thou maker of true morals to mankind,
The grand morality is love to thee."

Let the love of Christ be well established in our hearts, and we shall have laid the surest foundation of "all virtue and godliness of living." The ways of God's commandments will then be ways of pleasantness, and the paths of pure and undefiled religion, will be paths of peace. If you have been buried with Christ by baptism; if through the Lord's merciful goodness you have received this sacramental sign and seal of your ingrafting into his holy church, and partaking of the benefits of his meritorious death, consider it not as your duty only, but as your privilege, and let it be your joy and pleasure, to walk in newness of life. Rejoice in being delivered from the bondage of those sins which enslave the unrenewed heart. It is your prerogative, and be it your joy and glory, to be the disciples of a divine Master, and to follow his steps in doing your heavenly Father's will. It is an invaluable privilege that you may "cry Abba," and call God your Father; that you are ingrafted into the body of his church, and made his children by adoption; that you may address him as a kind parent, and ask for the things that you need. For what earthly consideration would a believer in Christ be debarred of these favours?

May we all then duly appreciate our religious privileges; may we, who have been baptized, "lead the rest of our lives according to that beginning;" may we make such improvement of the gospel light and the means of grace, which we enjoy, that God, "according to his mercy, may save us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" to whom, with the Father and the Son, be eternal praise.

SERMON XIV.



REGENERATION AND RENOVATION.

Titus iii. 5.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

THE knowledge of God, and of the way of salvation which he has revealed in Jesus Christ, must in the view of every Christian, certainly be the most excellent and the most necessary of all knowledge; without this knowledge, our faith must be weak, our zeal blind, and our works imperfect. To obtain this knowledge, we must understand the language in which it is "written for our learning." Words and language can be of no use, except they convey to our minds distinct ideas, and some definite sense. When used carelessly, they "darken counsel. Words without knowledge," like other "things without life, except they give a distinction in the sounds," give us no information. "If the trumpet give an

uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise you, (says an apostle,) except ye utter by the tongue, words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air." Not a little of what is said on the subject of religion, is thus spoken to the air. Partly indeed, from the discordant systems of theologians, but in no small degree from a negligent use of theological terms, religious disputes are sometimes but strifes of words.

Such has been particularly the case of the words used in our present text. The apostle here declares, that the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are the instruments of divine "mercy," by which God saves us. Salvation is not the reward of our merits; it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done;" neither did the Jews under the law, nor do we under the gospel, live so righteously as to render God obligated to save our souls; "but according to his mercy, he saves us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

It is intended, with divine permission, to show, according to the wisdom given me, what we are to understand by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. And also, how it is that by them God saves us.

I. What we ought precisely to understand by the word regeneration, has been of late years much controverted. Literally, it signifies a begetting again, or a new birth. In its primary scriptural use, it signifies the resurrection to a new and future state, or

the renewal of our nature after death, which differs from a resurrection only as generation does from a birth. Our Saviour uses the word in this its primitive sense, when, in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, he says to his disciples, "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, (or at the resurrection,) when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, shall also sit upon twelve thrones."

But in our text, it is used in a metaphorical sense, for a spiritual birth or a resurrection from the death of sin, to a state of holiness or spiritual life. Among Christians, even the most learned, there is a diversity of opinion respecting a correct use of this word, and especially respecting baptismal regeneration. This interminable controversy is sometimes but a strife of words; they who are agreed in the truths or doctrine that men must be baptized, and that their hearts must be renewed, differ respecting the words which are proper to express the change wrought, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; and sometimes they seem to be unreasonably tenacious of their phraseology. Some view regeneration as having no connection with baptism; as the commencement of sanctification: in their view it is the change of the heart by the Spirit of God. The scriptures, we know, teach nothing more clearly than that the heart must be renewed, created again unto good works; and this must unquestionably be the work of God's Spirit. None can, with any reason, pretend that this is effected by the washing of water. Many, like Cornelius and his friends, are renewed by God's Spirit, before they are baptized; and some,

we may well fear, after their baptism, remain, like Simon, "in the gall of bitterness," unrenewed and unforgiven.

But they who hold to this spiritual regeneration, may differ but little, except in the use of words from others, who by regeneration, understand the change of state which is effected by baptism, and the sanctification that inseparably attends the regular administration of that sacrament. In their view, regeneration is the grace of baptism; it is our birth from the world into the church; and all who are baptized are, in this sense of the word, of course regenerated. The change of heart, which they also allow to be necessary, they think should be expressed by other words, as "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." But if we should allow this sense to the word regeneration, a word which is used but twice in the bible, still there are other words and phrases of like import, such as born again, born of God, begotten again, and born of the Spirit, which are often used in the scriptures, and sometimes so used, that they cannot mean baptism. And it is evident, that this figurative or metaphorical new birth; this spiritual resurrection from a death of sin to a life of righteousness, may, with propriety, be called regeneration; if we are begotten again, if we are born of God, most certainly we are regenerate. And it is to be regretted, that there should be even a verbal difference among Christians on this point; it causes uncharitable disputation, and the appearance of great difference in doctrine, even where little or none exists. It has also caused a misunderstanding of the language of our liturgy. Some infer from it, that we believe in no necessary

change of heart, but what is effected in baptism; and others, that no baptized person, though ever so wicked, can with propriety be addressed as unregenerate.

In my view of this subject, it is by divine wisdom so ordered, that the sacrament which admits us into the church and covenant with God, symbolizes or represents this first resurrection or new birth. St. Paul tells the Colossians, (ii. 12,) that "in baptism they are buried with Christ, and risen with him." And the Romans, that "we are buried with Christ by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Baptism signifies the remission of sins through repentance and faith in Christ's death; that we die to sin and rise to newness of life. Clearly and uniformly does the church teach the same. Thus in her catechism it is said, that "the inward and spiritual grace" of baptism, is "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." And in the baptismal office, that "baptism doth represent unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ and to be made like unto him; that as he died and rose again for us, so should we, who are baptized, die from sin and rise again unto righteousness." And in her article she says, that "baptism is a sign of regeneration or new birth;" that it represents this spiritual change.

Now if "baptism represents unto us our profession;" if it is but "the sign" of this change, of course it is not in itself the change. Baptism, strictly speaking, is not regeneration; it is rather a sacramental representation of the new birth. But it is

natural, and it is authorized in the figurative use of words, to speak of this sacrament as being what it signifies or represents. It in time became common to speak of baptism as being regeneration; or rather to speak of a baptized person as being regenerate or born again. When you consider that baptism is the sacrament of regeneration; that as St. Paul says to the Galatians, "As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ;" that it is an ordinance appointed by our blessed Saviour, "whereby, says an article, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed;" that it represents "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness," and that when it is rightly received, God's sanctifying benediction attends the ministration; considering, I say, that such is the nature and design of this ordinance, there may be no great impropriety in speaking of the effects of baptism as a birth or regeneration, provided we are careful not to misapprehend the true doctrine, nor to ascribe more effects to baptism than the scriptures authorize.

Our blessed Lord speaks of it as a birth to Nicodemus; "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The "birth of water" here, undoubtedly means baptism, and our Saviour calls it a birth, because, as we have seen, it represents our being spiritually born again; it symbolizes the efficacy of his blood in washing away our sins, and represents also, our part of the Christian covenant, which is through faith in

him, to rise to "newness of life." And so in our text, "the washing of regeneration," in my judgment, means baptism. It is the same, in sense, as the "birth of water;" it means the washing of our bodies with water, in that sacrament or rite, which signifies that we are buried with Christ and risen with him. Hence, the primitive Christians were accustomed to speak of baptism as the sacrament of regeneration. And we still speak of baptized persons as being regenerate. Sacramentally they are become new creatures; they have professed a faith in Christ, and promised to "walk in newness of life;" and they have received the sacramental sign and seal of their covenant with God, and of their adoption to be his children. And if (in the language of our church,) "they receive baptism rightly," they are not in appearance only, but truly "members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of his heavenly kingdom." But though they receive the outward "washing of regeneration," if they have not the repentance and faith which are "required of persons to be baptized," they are not benefitted; they are still "in the gall of bitterness." Our article expressly, and very truly declares, "that in such only as worthily receive the sacraments, they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation;" that is, if they come to baptism without repentance and faith, their sins are increased instead of being washed away. Of this, we have, in the eighth of the Acts, a remarkable instance, in the case of Simon the magician.

Baptism represents the new birth, in like manner, as the Lord's supper does the body and blood of

Christ; and the outward part and the thing signified, are not more necessarily connected in the one sacrament, than in the other. We may come to the Lord's supper, without receiving "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the body and blood of Christ;" and we may receive baptism without being truly regenerate and born of God. "The washing of regeneration" is then, a washing which signifies regeneration; which represents "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." This "inward part, or thing signified," cannot be effected merely by the sacramental washing; it requires the operation of God's Spirit; "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." And this spiritual benediction is not promised to those who receive this sacrament unworthily, though they receive it by one who is truly a minister of Christ. On our part is required, "repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ." This will appear more evident, from what the apostle adds in the latter part of our text. As our Lord makes a distinction between the birth of water and the birth of the Spirit, declaring both of them to be necessary to our entering the kingdom of God; so the apostle here teaches, that God saves us, not only by the washing of regeneration, but also by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, nor the sinner his own heart. This is the work of God's Spirit, who, by his mighty power, and in a way, we may humbly believe, consistent with our moral freedom, subdues the enmity of our hearts, sanctifies our affections, and works in us to will and to do what is pleasing to God. The notion that these are insepa-

rable; that they who are born of water, are of course renewed in the spirit of their mind, is too evidently erroneous to need refutation. The renovation of the heart is represented in baptism; but, as has been also shown, we have too much reason to fear, that many who come to this sacrament, in its outward ministration, do not partake of "the inward part or thing signified." Our church, in her ministrations, wisely follows where the sure word of God directs her. She also speaks of baptism as the washing of regeneration; as are ligious and very solemn transaction, denoting the new birth; and without interrupting the solemnities of the sacrament with any suspicions of hypocrisy, in the language of that charity which "hopeth all things and believeth all things," she supposes that the person or child baptized, possesses, or through God's grace, in a time accepted, will possess the requisite qualifications. The proper examination into the qualifications of those who are to be baptized, should be at some time previous. During the solemn service, it would be less fitting to suggest doubts about the efficacy of the sacrament, or the sincerity of those who receive it. In ancient times, these things were well understood; and our church retains the language of former ages. In the present state of religion, there is, we have observed, some confusion in the use of theological terms; Christians hear them every one "in his own language, and in the tongue wherein he was born." This makes it necessary for us frequently to give these explanations. An alteration of some few expressions in our liturgy, would render these explanations less necessary, and would remove one great obstacle to the success of our

labours. But till such alteration, by the permission of God and the wisdom of his church, shall be made, let us be careful rightly to understand her language, and to embrace her sound scriptural doctrine.

II. Thus have I endeavoured to show you what we are to understand by “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The apostle declares, that by these, God in his mercy saves us. How this is done, must of course be also a point of very important inquiry. It is not in our text only that baptism is thus connected with our salvation. The commission which Christ gave us, or rather the doctrine which he commands us to preach to every creature is, “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.” And he tells Nicodemus that this birth of water and of the Spirit, is necessary to our entering God’s kingdom. St. Peter says, that Noah’s salvation in the ark, was “the like figure whereunto baptism also now saves us.” When a convicted multitude of “three thousand souls” asked of Peter and the other apostles, “men and brethren, what shall we do?” they were told to “repent and be baptized.”

Certainly then, there is a sense in which baptism may be said to save us; nor is this difficult to be understood. It saves us

First: As admitting us into a state of salvation; into God’s kingdom or church, where we enjoy the means of grace, the communion of saints, and all the privileges of God’s elect or chosen people. It saves us, St. Peter says, as being “the answer of a good conscience towards God,” and sealing to our hope, the

benefits conferred on his people “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” By baptism we are admitted to participate in the Christian covenant; and we have the answer of a good conscience, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, and through faith in Christ’s triumphant resurrection. Baptism assures believers that “Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification;” and “because he lives, that we shall live also.” By baptism the Christian’s hopes are increased, and he is much encouraged in working out his salvation. He is visibly made God’s child by adoption, and joint heir of Christ’s heavenly kingdom.

2. Baptism saves us too, as being the sign of the new birth; as representing unto us our profession, and laying us under the most solemn covenant and obligation to walk in newness of life. In this sacrament the Lord stipulates, that on condition of our repentance, and faith and obedience, we are members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of his heavenly kingdom; that if we bear his cross, we shall share his crown; “if so be that we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together.”

3. And we may add, that baptism saves us, “as a means whereby we receive inward grace, and a pledge to assure us thereof.” “Faith is confirmed, (says our article,) and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.” We are much strengthened by prayer on all occasions. God gives his Spirit and his grace to all who ask in a true faith. But when, in addition to our solemn prayer, we receive in faith this washing of regeneration, this sign and seal of God’s mercies in Christ, it is a powerful means of sanctification,

and very much strengthens us to work out our salvation.

But though the washing of regeneration is an instrument so gracious and important in that system of mercy by which God saves us, of itself it would be totally insufficient. We must be renewed in the spirit of our minds; there must be a birth not in sign only, but in spirit and in truth. The sinful affections of our heart must be changed to a spirit of love and obedience; we must, not in profession only, but indeed and truly, “bring forth fruits meet for repentance,” and “walk in newness of life.” That the scriptures require of those who would be saved in Christ for ever, all this, and much more to the same purpose, you must well know. And it is not less evident that it can be effected only by the Spirit of God; “by the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” We could never be or do any thing pleasing in God’s sight without his divine aid; except he change and sanctify our hearts, and produce in us holy affections and godly living. Baptism will never save us, except we “lead the rest of our life according to that beginning.” It is by the Spirit of God working within us to will and to do, that we can make our calling and election sure.

But this doctrine does not lead to the inference, that your own pious exertions are unavailing or useless, but to the contrary; for God has promised the aid of his Spirit to those who seek for it as he directs; and this is the greatest of all encouragements to strive, that God himself will in consequence be our helper. Neither may we infer that means are unnecessary, but just the contrary; for it is by a right use of the

means graciously given, that we are to obtain help from God. The doctrine teaches us to be humble; to know and to acknowledge our own weakness; to put our trust in God; to submit to his righteousness; and be thankful for his mercies. It teaches us to prize highly, and to use faithfully, all those means which God has given. God saves you by the washing of regeneration; he makes that sacrament instrumental to your obtaining life eternal. If you receive the sacraments with that frame of mind which the Saviour requires, they will help you in obtaining inward and spiritual grace. Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you and to your children.

In our present text, the washing of regeneration is mentioned before the renewing of the Holy Ghost; and in another passage, the birth of water before the birth of the Spirit, which may be intended to teach us the order of divine grace; to remind us that spiritual blessings are to be obtained by the use of means. To have faith, men must hearken to the word preached; "for how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear without a preacher?" You must ask, if you would receive; and they who would find, must first seek. That your soul may be strengthened by the body and blood of Christ, you must devoutly eat and drink in remembrance of him, "bread and wine which the Lord hath commanded to be received." In like manner, baptism is not only "the sign of regeneration;" but the Spirit of God, we may humbly believe, will the rather sanctify those who devoutly

receive it; it is one of the means of obtaining "the renewing of the Holy Ghost." This shows the fitness of baptizing infants, "when, by reason of their tender age," they can neither repent or believe. If they are "brought to Christ" in faith, and offered with devout prayer to God, we should "not doubt, but earnestly believe, that he will wash and sanctify them with the Holy Ghost," and that the promise of repentance, and faith and obedience, which "they make by their sureties," they will be the more likely, "when they come of age, themselves to keep and perform."

You then, who would be "saved, according to God's mercy," should have due regard, both to "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." You are to receive not only "the outward, visible sign, or form in baptism," but chiefly to desire and seek for "the inward part, or thing signified;" which is "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness;" you are to be born not only of water, but of the Spirit; to be regenerated, not only in form and profession, but in spirit and in truth. The outward part is positively required, and is of course, essentially important. How can we reasonably hope that we shall be members of the church in heaven, while we refuse to be members of the church on earth? Without "this sacrament where it may be had," we cannot have so full an assurance that our sins are forgiven, and that we are members incorporate in the mystical body of Christ.

But still the thing signified, that through the renewing operation of God's Holy Spirit, you die to sin and rise again unto righteousness, is far more

essential. For this should you unceasingly strive and pray. "Grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption." When we, who are Christians, "sin wilfully," we "do despite unto the Spirit of grace;" we tempt God to "take his Holy Spirit from us." In all ways and by all means, should we continually endeavour to be renewed day by day; and chiefly by prayer. "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much rather shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him." May we all so ask, that our hearts may be sanctified; our joy be full, and our souls be saved in Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XV.



THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY.

Heb. vi. 1, 2.

Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

THE first word of this text refers us to what the apostle had said immediately before. Treating of our Saviour's priesthood, he had observed that he had many things to say, which (such was their dulness of hearing,) they would not be likely to understand. He reproves the Hebrews for the slow progress which they had made in religious knowledge. Considering "the time" during which they had been disciples of Christ, "they ought themselves to have been teachers;" they should have been so advanced in knowledge, as to be able to instruct others; but so little had they attended to the things of God, that it was necessary to "teach them again which are the first principles of the oracles of God;" to treat

them as babes; to feed them with milk, because they were unable to digest the stronger meat of the word; they were yet too ignorant of the gospel to understand and profit by its sublimer doctrines. And in the text before us, he exhorts them to correct this fault; to give diligence to be better instructed in Christian theology; to "leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ;" to become as soon as possible, well established in the rudiments of Christianity; and then "go on to perfection;" then give their chief attention to the more sublime mysteries of the Christian faith, and aim at higher attainments in religious knowledge.

Before we can build the superstructure, it is then necessary that the foundation be laid. We must understand "the first principles," before we can possibly "go on to perfection." We find in this epistle, and in other writings of St. Paul, that in the first and best age of Christianity, they who had long been professors, still needed instruction in the rudiments of religion, in "the first principles of the oracles of God." We are men of like passions and like frailties as the first Christians; and may well expect, what we too often find, that those who have long professed and called themselves Christians, should, in many cases, be unsettled in the rudiments of the gospel faith; and (as the fact is,) that we who preach the gospel, should be under the necessity of speaking to Christians, as to babes in Christ, and of teaching again and again, what ought long since to have been well known. In order to obey what the apostle directs in this text, it is necessary first to understand and well consider, what are the first principles of

Christianity, and to be well and firmly established in them. This, therefore, is proposed as our present subject; these “first principles of the doctrine of Christ;” and that we may not be doubtful on a subject of such general and deep concern, the apostle has distinctly, and in their due order, stated what these first principles are; namely, “Repentance from dead works; faith towards God; the doctrine of baptisms; laying on of hands; the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” These six points are, he tells you, the foundation of our religion; the basis on which we are to be built up a holy temple unto the Lord.

The importance of the subject, is of course sufficiently evident. The first principles of the gospel are evidently essential to our religious state; except we are established in these, we build our house upon the sand. Let us then, distinctly, though we can but briefly view them. You will find that they are all essential, and that the apostle has arranged them in that order which best corresponds with propriety and experience.

1. First of the six stands, “repentance from dead works,” or from those sinful works whose wages is death. That this is first of all necessary, you well know, is the uniform testimony of God’s word; in the gospel which we preach, “he calls on men every where to repent.” Without repentance we cannot be prepared to receive the Saviour. “He that is whole, needs not a physician.” Till a man views himself as a guilty offender, as concluded under sin, and hopeless without a ransom, how can he feel any deep interest in him who “appeared on earth to put

away sin by the sacrifice of himself?" No one, except he is awakened to a sense of his guilt, and feels that the wrath of God justly abideth on him, could cry out in the agony of contrition, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death." "O thou son of David, have mercy upon me." A man may indeed, without repentance, have a speculative faith in Jesus Christ; but his belief would have little effect upon his conduct; he would still live to the world. He would neglect religious duties, or perform them with coldness and formality. Supposing that little to him is forgiven, he would love little. He would feel little need of an expiation for his sins past, or of the aid of God's Spirit to enable him to live well for the time to come. To teach the world how necessary is repentance to a saving faith in Christ, John the Baptist was sent before the Lord, to prepare his way by preaching it. This was the sum of his doctrine, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So too, what Christ and his disciples first preached, was, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe the gospel." If we truly repent, we are prepared; it is natural to fly from "dead works" to a living Saviour. The works first required of those who would become his disciples, are "works meet for repentance." By repentance we come to ourselves; we are moved to "arise and go to our heavenly Father, and say unto him, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

2. "Faith towards God," does the apostle mention as the second principle of the doctrine of Christ. And how indispensable it is to our justification and

acceptance with God, no one who reads the scriptures can be wholly ignorant. Faith is the principle by which the just live, or by which we are accounted just; by which our obedience is truly religious, and our works acceptable to God. Repentance, without faith, would lead to despair. Without a Saviour, it is not possible to conceive how mercy and truth can meet together; how God can be just, and yet justify sinners. Were you conscious that you are a guilty offender; did you see the just vengeance of divine justice hanging over you, what would remain but agonizing terrors and hopeless despondence? But if you know that there is "balm in Gilead and a physician there;" if you believe that the Lord has laid help on one who is mighty; that a meritorious sacrifice is made for your transgressions; that Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God" who expiates your guilt; who "takes away the sins of the world," your heart will be filled with comfort, and your soul with peace, and you will go on your way rejoicing. Repentance makes us feel that we need, and prepares us to receive the Saviour. Faith is the comforting belief that God so loved us, as to send his only begotten Son to be our deliverer; it is the receiving of Christ as the only way to pardon, life, and peace.

3. But it is the Lord's will that we who believe in Christ, and desire to obtain his salvation, should manifest before the world that we have chosen us the Lord to serve him; that we become members of his church, and make a public profession of being his disciples. A particular ordinance for this purpose he has himself appointed; and here, in its due place, does the apostle reckon as a third essential principle,

“the doctrine of baptisms;” the knowledge and comfort of that sacrament, by which God’s mercies in Christ are sealed to the faithful. Baptism is an ordinance “ordained by Christ himself,” which is our visible admission into his spiritual kingdom. In using the word “baptisms” in the plural, the apostle includes, we may reasonably suppose, all the various administrations of this ordinance, as the baptism used by the Jews; that administered by John, and that which was ordained by Christ. It includes the baptism of water, and that of the Holy Ghost; and also the various modes of baptism, by sprinkling, affusion, and immersion. And not improbably the apostle may have respect to the different subjects of baptism, as infants and children, young people and old. Infants, “by reason of their tender age,” cannot repent or believe; but they have immortal souls, and they need a Saviour, in common with those who are older. It is only in Christ that they can spiritually live. To little children he is “the resurrection and the life.” He has not debarred them from the blessings of his church, but has declared, that “of such is the kingdom of God.” He proposes their qualifications as a pattern for all others; “Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.” He invites little children to come unto him; he is “much displeased with those who would keep them from him;” he would have them brought up, not only in the faith, but “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” We ought, therefore, to “suffer little children to come unto him and forbid them not.” Those who have “sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgres-

sion," if they have repentance and faith, become as infants in heart and disposition, and qualified equally as little children to enter the Redeemer's kingdom. And it is remarkable that the apostle does not mention baptism simply as following repentance and faith, but "the doctrine of baptisms." You may have been baptized in infancy, or before you believed. But it is not till after you have faith, that the doctrine respecting the nature, the blessings, and the obligations of this sacrament, will enlighten your mind, direct your life, and enliven your hopes.

4. In Jesus Christ we are saved "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." The church here is militant; in heaven it will be triumphant. Here it is the kingdom of grace; there it will be the kingdom of glory. Baptism receives us into the church here; it shows that in our religious state we are the disciples of Christ. But to be prepared for blessedness hereafter, we must be born, not only of water, but of the Spirit. Our hearts must be sanctified and renewed. The aid or sanctification of the Holy Ghost, is necessary that we may walk worthy of our vocation; that we may work out our salvation, and attain at last to that blessed inheritance, which is promised to those who are united with their Saviour. And accordingly, there was another ordinance or rite used by the apostles, called "the laying on of hands;" and this, of course, St. Paul, in our text, mentions as a fourth principle of the doctrine of Christ, and following next in order after baptism. The apostles were accustomed, as we read in the history of the Acts, to lay their hands on those who had been baptized, and to pray that

they might receive the Holy Ghost. And by their authority, and after their example, the church has continued the same practice, through every age, down to the present time. It is, we believe, the same rite which we now usually call Confirmation; because the design of it is to confirm Christians in their baptismal covenant; and to strengthen, establish, and settle them in the faith and practice of Christian disciples. Those who were baptized in infancy, when, through God's preserving mercy and heavenly grace, they have arrived to a competent understanding of their spiritual state; when they are duly sensible of their own sinfulness, of Christ's merits and of God's mercy, present themselves to be confirmed, they manifest their desire and determination, to continue in their Christian profession; to walk, as God shall give them strength and grace, according to his word and will. Or if they were baptized in riper age, when they could answer for themselves in this ordinance of laying on of hands, they express their continued sense of the baptismal obligation; they acknowledge the fitness of what God requires in that sacrament, and declare their intention, with divine assistance, to perform it. After this public profession of their faith and devotion to God, the minister of Christ devoutly prays, that the Lord will strengthen them with the Holy Ghost, and daily increase in them his manifold gifts of grace. And he solemnly lays his hands upon them, "to certify them by this sign of God's favour and gracious goodness towards them." There can be no reasonable doubt but God approves of our thus renewing our covenant with him; and if our prayers and profession

are earnest and sincere, he will, we may well believe, give us his heavenly benediction. He will, the rather for our thus confessing him before men, let his fatherly hand be over us; his Holy Spirit be with us. Confirmation is one of the means of grace; and we need them all to help our infirmities. From the nature and design of this ordinance, you may easily see its use and importance, and the reason why it is thus numbered among the rudiments of the gospel. We pretend not to limit the grace of God, nor to say that the same blessings will not be given to the use of other means, or even without any means. But true faith directs us to the use of means; and no means certainly can be better, or more effectual, than those which the Lord ordained and his apostles practised.

5. Another principle of Christ's religion, is the doctrine of "the resurrection of the dead." Perhaps some will think that this is included in the second principle, that of "faith towards God." And so in our use of the word it often is. But faith, in its more proper sense, is a belief in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God and the Saviour of men; that it is only through the sacrifice of his cross and the merits of his righteousness, that we can be saved. But such is our weakness, that we have need to enlarge this foundation, and believe particularly, that Christ is "the resurrection and the life." Though we truly repent of our sins, and believe that God, through Christ, will forgive them; though we devote ourselves to his service in baptism, and renew it in confirmation, something further, and more particular, is necessary, that our hopes may be raised above the world; that we may hold our conversation in heaven.

The firm persuasion, the comforting assurance that Christ is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of all that sleep, is of the most essential importance to our stability in the Christian profession. How very essential this doctrine is; how very necessary that we should feel assured of its certainty, you see throughout the New Testament, and especially in St. Paul's fifteenth chapter to the Corinthians. Take this stone from the foundation, and, as he says, "your faith in Christ is vain," and your baptism into his death, is vain; for "why are we baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not?" This glorious doctrine completely establishes our hope in Christ. We can most cordially join with our apostle in saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Having this hope in afflictions, we sorrow not as others, who have it not; we know and feel, that "to live is Christ; to die is gain." "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him."

6. But mankind are liable to err in opposite extremes. Without a belief in the resurrection, our hopes would be darkened, our strength weak. Yet there is equal peril of a vain, unfounded confidence in the divine mercy. When we believe, that "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive," corrupt nature will incline to infer, that all men will certainly be saved; that because we are not under the law, but under grace, we may continue in sin without fear of future punishment. Therefore ano-

ther principle is added to this gospel foundation; the doctrine of "eternal judgment." The scriptures most clearly teach, and continually remind us, that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and be judged according to our works. Christ himself, who will be the judge, was very particular and explicit, in declaring what it is necessary for us particularly to consider, that the "hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." Who of us, Christian brethren, does not feel something of that evil heart of unbelief which inclines us to banish from our thoughts the fear of judgment, to flatter ourselves that though we neglect God's commands and walk in our own ways, we shall still escape a future, and especially an "eternal judgment." Without "a lively remembrance of that great day in which we must give a strict account of our thoughts, words, and actions, and according to the deeds done in the body, be eternally rewarded or punished by HIM who is appointed the judge of quick and dead," we should not "be effectually restrained from sin and excited to our duty." Without this sixth principle, men would flatter themselves that all punishment for sin is superseded by the atonement of Christ; or that future judgment will be only temporal, and not as the scriptures declare, eternal.

And thus do you see that these six principles are indeed the foundation "of the doctrine of Christ." They are all essential to the Christian character. You see too, the fitness and beauty of that natural

order in which the apostle has arranged them. The two first of them, repentance and faith, respect the preparation of our hearts. Repentance, without faith, as I have shown, would leave us in despondence. Faith, without repentance, an apostle has shown, is dead, being alone. But when we feel that sin is misery and death, and also know that God in his mercy has given us a Saviour, we are prepared to become his disciples, and live to his praise.

The two next, baptism and confirmation, are the ordinances which visibly designate our election in Christ, or our state as his disciples. Baptism receives us into his church; it is the appointed seal of God's covenant in Christ; it sacramentally translates us from the world into the kingdom of God. In the laying on of hands, we renew this covenant; we ratify and confirm our engagements to be the disciples of Christ, and to keep the commandments of God.

The remaining two, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment, are to assist us in living a godly life; they help us to walk in that straight and narrow way which leads to heaven. Without these two principles, we should almost surely turn to the right hand or to the left; we should either be discouraged, or careless in our Christian profession. We should wander on the one hand into despondence; or on the other, into presumption, living in sin, that grace may abound.

And let us not forget to examine, whether we may be implicated or concerned in the reproof given to the Hebrew Christians; whether we make such progress and religious improvement, as from our means and advantages may reasonably be expected. It is

certain that many, that very many in this Christian land, are for years, and some through all their life, hesitating and undetermined, respecting these rudiments of the gospel. Thousands, who have long been Christians, must still be fed with milk. Very many of the disputes and controversies among the disciples of Christ, are about these first principles, in which they ought all to be established, rapidly advancing in knowledge and true godliness. Many, though they call themselves Christians, have need to “lay again the foundation of repentance from dead works;” they do not break off from all their sins; they neglect many duties; they live to the world, and commit many actual transgressions. In their “faith towards God,” Christians are much unsettled. The scriptures are perverted, to make them teach what men choose to believe. The most essential doctrines of the cross, are controverted or denied. Various and contradictory opinions are disseminated, respecting the nature and offices of Christ, the efficacy of his sacrifice, and the terms of his salvation.

There is great defect in our regard for the ordinances of Christ and the means of grace. It is very difficult to persuade people to receive his sacraments, and make them understand their nature and use. Some despise them as of little consequence; others trust too much in them as containing almost the whole of religion; and others still neglect to receive them from a sense of their unworthiness; which is indeed the very thing which makes them necessary. There has been very much disputing about the doctrine of baptisms; about its effects and the subjects who ought to receive it, and even about the mode of administer-

ing it. These things occupy much time and attention which should be devoted to higher degrees of perfection.

The improvement of what has been said is so obvious, I scarce need to suggest it. Consider the danger and folly of this delay. The foundation should be laid soon; you should immediately be decided respecting these rudiments, that the main part of your life, all indeed that remains, may be devoted to higher attainments. You cannot doubt but God calls you to repentance, and he only knows how soon he will call you to judgment. Let your repentance then be perfect and sincere. "Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed." "He that offends in one point is guilty of all." He that lives in the deliberate violation of any of God's commandments, cannot be a true penitent. Make no reservation; endeavour in all things to be obedient and to serve the Lord in righteousness and true holiness. Let your faith be sound and fruitful. With honest minds and praying hearts, search the scriptures for that "faith which was once delivered to the saints." Search them especially for what they teach respecting the character of Christ, and the efficacy of his cross. In such a Saviour as the word of God reveals, you are required to believe; receive him as eminently your Prophet, your Priest, and your King.

And if you believe that there is no name given under heaven by which we can be saved, except the name of Christ, why should you hesitate respecting baptism? Why do you delay to become his disciples? What blessings more valuable; what privileges more

to be desired can you conceive of, than those which are exhibited and sealed in that sacrament? And for the same reason that you would be baptized, you should be willing and desire, at the first convenient opportunity, to be confirmed; to renew your engagement to be the Lord's disciple, and devoutly pray for his Holy Spirit, that you "may lead the rest of your life according to that beginning." Neither of these ordinances will ever be repeated. They belong to the first principles of Christianity, which, having once performed, you are to leave and go on to perfection. Your great object afterwards, should be to know God's word and do his will; to correct your faults, and daily to proceed in all virtue and godliness of living.

To assist you in this, which is most of all important, the Lord has placed before you hopes and fears; "a blessing and a curse." Our Saviour Christ has brought life and immortality to light. Knowing that he who died for your sins yet lives; that death has no more dominion over him; that by rising from the dead he has become the first-fruits of them that sleep, you can rejoice in the Lord always. By this stupendous act of Omnipotence, "he has begotten us again to a lively hope." You are conquerors and more than conquerors through him who thus loved you. But knowing also that the same Lord will again come in the clouds of heaven, and call the world to judgment; knowing that you must at that awful day, stand before his tribunal, and render an account for all your conduct, this sixth principle will check all presumption; you will serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

The same Lord, in his merciful goodness grant, that we may all so trust in his merits, hope in his promise, and fear his name, that in this world we may live to his glory, and in the world to come, enjoy life everlasting. Amen.

SERMON XVI.



ON RECEIVING THE LORD'S SUPPER UNWORTHILY.

1 Cor. xi. 27. 29—34.

Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation.

THE sacrament called the Lord's Supper, has ever been considered, and is justly considered, as the most solemn and affecting ordinance of Christianity. It represents that spiritual food which is the nourishment of our souls. "Jesus said, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and

drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." The body and blood of Christ are spiritually taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper. The Israelites passed through the sea, and were baptized unto Moses but once; but they continued to observe the Passover while life continued. The paschal lamb was a type of Christ, who is "the Lamb of God, which truly taketh away the sins of the world." As Christians daily need the spiritual manna, the "angels' food," which is the word of God, so should they continually commemorate the Christian passover, the death of Christ, which is the only real sacrifice; they should do this, as our Lord has commanded, in remembrance of him. "For," (as St. Paul says, in the words immediately before our text,) "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." It is an authorized symbol of that sacrifice which alone can take away our sins. It is an "assurance of God's goodness towards us, and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of his Son."

But the sacraments "have a wholesome effect or operation, in such only as worthily receive them;" and the church, whenever she administers the communion, most solemnly admonishes her children, that it is worse than useless; that "the danger is great if they receive it unworthily." In no other part of the bible is this subject so clearly and fully treated as in this chapter before us, and especially in the words of our text. It is a passage of scripture much noticed, and very often misapplied. Very many,

who are desirous to be Christians in profession, as they already are in heart, and who, by their faith and humbleness of mind, are well qualified to commune in the church, are deterred, through fear of incurring the damnation here mentioned; through fear that they shall eat and drink unworthily, and be guilty of Christ's body and blood.

In the present discourse, it is intended, as the Lord shall give me wisdom, to explain this remarkable passage, and apply, for our own practice and improvement, the doctrine it teaches. And for this purpose, I propose to examine what is the fault here reprov'd; what is the judgment which will follow; and for what end is the judgment sent.

I. The fault here reprov'd, is eating and drinking the bread and wine in the Lord's supper *unworthily*; and this consists particularly in "not discerning the Lord's body." They who are thus careless and faulty, are guilty of his body and blood. The import of these expressions is first to be ascertained.

To partake of this sacrament unworthily, is evidently to receive it in a manner and with a disposition of heart, unsuitable to the nature and design of the institution. Sinners we all are; were we not so, there would be no need of our coming to the Lord's supper, nor to the Lord in any way, for he does not call the righteous. And if sinners, we are of course unworthy, we can merit nothing. This eating unworthily, means, therefore, something more than the want of that perfect goodness which no one possesses; it is rather our not being duly sensible that we are unworthy; it is a want of penitence, faith, and love,

and of a thankful sense of God's mercy in Jesus Christ. The fault here reproved, is inattention to the nature of this sacrament; or, as the apostle very comprehensively expresses it, not discerning the Lord's body; not duly considering the intention of those consecrated symbols; disregarding "the inward part or thing signified."

St. Paul here has respect particularly to the case of the Corinthian Christians, to whom he is writing, and whose culpable irregularities he had just before exposed. By attending to their faults, we shall better see the apostle's meaning. When they assembled on these sacramental occasions, there were among them some disorderly persons, who regarded not so much the eating of the Lord's supper, as feasting themselves. It was then customary, on such occasions, to have social meals, called feasts of charity, which were conducted in a manner suitable to express their thankfulness to God, and their brotherly love. The provisions were usually furnished by the more wealthy, and the whole was eaten in common. But some of these Corinthians, it seems, were so selfish and forgetful of the occasion on which they were convened, that each of them kept to himself his own provisions; and some, in consequence, had more than they needed, while the poor had nothing; as the apostle expresses it, "One was hungry and another drunken;" or rather, as the meaning is, and the translation might be, "One was hungry, and another filled." Some had less, and others more than they needed. Thus the bond of charity was broken; the Saviour and his doctrine were not regarded. While they were thus "carnal and walked as men," the

nature and object of the holy sacrament were forgotten. Intent chiefly on feeding their bodies, they did not discern the body and blood of Christ, which were symbolized by the bread and wine, and in remembrance of whom they ought to have eaten. Immediately before or after those love-feasts, they probably received the Lord's supper. And with such selfishness and want of Christian love, and such disposition to carnal festivity, they could not in a suitable manner receive the sacrament; and they probably were guilty of the Lord's body and blood; of profaning the sacred memorials of his sacrifice for our sins. To be guilty of his body and blood, is to be guilty of not respecting it; guilty of not having for those sacred symbols due reverence and regard; of using them as common and worldly things. It is virtually to crucify him afresh; it is to "count the blood of the covenant wherewith we were sanctified, an unholy thing;" it is to drown ourselves in that fountain of living water which is provided for our refreshment; in like manner, as men injure their natural health by intemperance; by a sinful use of that wholesome food which God gives to strengthen the body and support life.

That this is the apostle's sense, and that he has regard in our text to that irregularity of the Corinthians, is evident in the two last verses, which conclude the subject, and contain the improvement which he makes from it: "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another; and if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto condemnation." If they tarried one for another; if they manifested a suitable

affection for their brethren; avoided all disorderly conduct, and duly considered the meaning and purpose of the Lord's supper, they would not eat unworthily, nor come together to condemnation.

II. It was proposed, secondly, to consider what is the punishment threatened, or the judgment which would follow such an abuse of the sacrament; what is the damnation, or condemnation spoken of in the text. The same Greek word, which in the twenty-ninth verse of the text is rendered damnation, in the thirty-fourth verse is translated condemnation. The two English words, therefore, mean here the same thing; and what that meaning is, we are now to examine; whether it signifies the punishment which is to be in a future state; or temporal sufferings and other afflictions, in this present life. And it is so evident and certain, both from the text, and the use of the word in other passages, we need not hesitate in saying that the latter is the true sense; it signifies temporal judgment inflicted in this present life. This appears from the use of the word in other passages. For instance, in the twenty-third chapter of Luke: "One of the malefactors" crucified with Jesus, a graceless, hardened wretch, "railed on him, saying, if thou be the Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" Here it is certain that the word cannot mean future punishment; for that was a condemnation which Christ was never in; it evidently means the judgment or punishment of crucifixion which all three of them were then suffering. So

again, in the fourth chapter of St. Peter's first epistle; "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." Here the same word is rendered judgment; but it does not mean "eternal judgment;" for that cannot begin at the house of God. St. Peter speaks of the afflictions, which Christians, in that season of persecution, were called to endure. And therefore, he justly concludes, "Let them who suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." We have another instance in the thirteenth chapter to the Romans. In exhorting Christians to be obedient to their temporal rulers, St. Paul says, "Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation." That is, they will incur the penalty of the laws which they violate, and be punished by the magistrate; "for" (adds the apostle,) "he beareth not the sword in vain; he is the minister of God; a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

But we have no need of examining other passages; it is evident, from the words of our text, that the apostle speaks here of temporal judgments. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause (he adds,) many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Here it is very evident, that the condemnation he speaks of, is temporal judgment; such as weakness, sickness, and temporal death.

III. If this point can be more clear, it will appear so, from considering what was thirdly proposed. For what end these judgments are sent; and this the apostle declares in the thirty-second verse. "When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." You see then, that the judgment, the damnation, of which the apostle here speaks, is the Lord's chastening, so often mentioned in his word and experienced by the people "whom he loves." And the object of it, the intention and purpose of this chastening or judgment is, "that we should not be condemned with the world." So far is this damnation from being the punishment of the future state, that it is designed to prevent that punishment, that we should not be so condemned. This comes within the dispensation of his mercy, to chasten those whom he loves, and to scourge the sons whom he receives. We are clearly taught in the scriptures, what from his truth and faithfulness we might expect, that Christians, who are in covenant with him, are more especially under his paternal care; and he promises not to leave or forsake them. He will bear long with them, and use providential means to reclaim those who err before he will cast them off. If they are cold, means are used to awaken them to righteousness. When they go astray, his dispensations are directed to bring them back into the right way; and when other means fail, or when unerring wisdom knows that afflictions will be most suitable or most effectual, these are sent. While hardened, impenitent transgressors, and thousands who despise God's mercies, are permitted to go on prosperous and live in pride, his chosen people

are often under the rod. Many of them are weak ; they are afflicted with debility and various other infirmities, as thorns in their flesh, that they may be more humble and submissive, and may feel that the service of this world is but vanity and vexation of spirit. Many Christians also are sickly; they are exercised with pain, and alarmed with the approach of death. Often, we cannot doubt these visitations are designed to exhibit God's people as examples of patient suffering; to show the stability of their faith, and to honour God in the power of his grace; but often also, to purify their hearts, and to correct their faults, that they may "awake to righteousness and sin not." "And many sleep;" for the same purpose of correction, and that his people may learn righteousness, this affliction also is sometimes sent. When Christians become careless or worldly in their affections, or their feet turn aside from the way of truth, to the right hand or to the left, they, and all who need such correction, are called to mourn. The Lord smites their gourd; he removes the idols which chain their souls to the earth. He will melt down their hearts in this furnace of affliction; he will take from them a beloved child, or some other dear relative or friend. And sometimes, we may well believe, to deliver his people from the temptations and sins which he sees before them, he takes them from the world and all its evils.

Such is evidently the sense of this remarkable passage; and you will readily see how important is the application to our practice. And one inference, among the most obvious and most important is, that this passage cannot reasonably deter or discourage

any one from coming to the Lord's supper; it ought, in reason, to have the contrary effect. For if you discern the Lord's body; if you have right views of this sacrament, what it represents and what it means; if you believe that Christ "has put away sins by the sacrifice of himself," and sincerely desire to partake of the benefits of that sacrifice, you will not incur the guilt of what the apostle here condemns. In such case, you will, of course, discern the Lord's body. The feasts of charity, such as were in use in the apostle's days, have long since been discontinued, probably because they were so much abused; and, there is not now, through the Lord's blessing, much reason to apprehend the recurrence of such disorders as the apostle has here exposed; external decency, at least, is now generally observed in the administration of the Sacraments. Let it be your care to receive the communion as the comfortable testimony of the Lord's mercy, and of the Saviour's love, and it will be sanctified to "the strengthening and refreshing of your soul, by the body and blood of Christ, as your bodies are by the bread and wine."

But some perhaps will fear, that according to the true doctrine of the text, the profession of religion will bring upon themselves temporal judgments; that they may in consequence be weak or sickly, or lose their friends. But if you sincerely endeavour to live as Christians; "to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God," this will not be likely to happen. Generally speaking, there are no people who are more blessed, or who live more happily in this world, than the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. It is when they think too much of this world and its

happiness; it is when they prize temporal enjoyments above spiritual blessings, and incline to be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God,” that he uses the rod of correction to reclaim his people, or to preserve them from sin and spiritual death. All who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must indeed expect some trials in consequence of their religion. But this will be more than balanced by many privileges, and valuable comforts and enjoyments, in this life; and what is infinitely more valuable, they have hope in that promise which is to those who suffer for righteousness sake. To such the Saviour says, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in heaven.”

But suppose it were certain, that in consequence of your Christian profession, you will suffer such judgments as the apostle here mentions, do you consider from whom, and for what purpose they are sent; that they come from the Lord; that they are sent in mercy; that their gracious object is to prevent your being condemned with the world, even to save your soul from endless misery? Are you then unwilling to be under the Lord’s discipline; to be subject to your heavenly Father, who knows so well and is so mercifully disposed to give good gifts to his children? Had you rather lose heaven than feel his rod? Had you rather “enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short season,” and then for ever perish with a sinful world, than “suffer affliction with the people of God;” than to “be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?” Remember who has said, that he who would thus save his life, shall lose it; and that he who will lose it for Christ’s sake, shall find it. If you would

that God should let you alone; if you would not be partakers of his grace; if you desire not the aid and comforts of the divine Spirit, or if you prefer the pleasures of the present life to all the blessings of the gospel, then may you consistently refuse to make a profession of religion, and to have the King of Zion rule over you; then you may, to the awful peril of your souls, “go your way, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise.”

If then, there be any of you who have heretofore from the sound, rather than the sense of this text, been constrained to absent yourselves from this holy communion, it is now hoped, and it is our humble prayer, that the Lord, in his merciful goodness, may so sanctify what has been said, as to remove all groundless scruples of this sort.

They who are communicants, should well consider the vast importance of receiving this sacrament worthily, that they may please God, and truly be edified by the dispensations of his mercy. By a faithful and diligent use of appointed means, and endeavouring in all things to do the will of God, you will not only obtain a lively hope of a blessed immortality, but you may not improbably avoid troubles and sufferings in this world. Christians, by their careless living, “pierce themselves through with many sorrows.” We ought to rejoice that the Lord chastises whom he loves; that he will not withhold correction, which is necessary for our spiritual good. But it is wiser to learn wisdom without chastisement, than under it; better it is, that the patient goodness and long-suffering of God, than that his judgments, should lead us

to repentance. He asks by his prophet, “why will ye be stricken?”

And it ought, in connection with our subject, to be further and well considered, that the scriptures pronounce condemnation on other sins, besides that of not discerning the Lord’s body; and also on every neglect of duty. No sin is greater, nor is any thing more offensive to God, than rejecting the gospel, or refusing the invitation of Jesus Christ to come unto him and be saved. St. Paul most solemnly asks, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Consider that we may do other things unworthily, and in so doing, also sin, and displease God. If we abuse or misuse any of his blessings, we incur the like displeasure. You may attend church unworthily, if you do it from worldly motives; if you refuse to join in the worship of God, and in giving honour and praise to his holy name; if, in his house of prayer, your thoughts are occupied with vain and worldly things; and if you do not hear with an intention to observe his word, you are guilty of despising his mercies, and of neglecting his great salvation. If we are hearers and not doers of God’s word, we certainly hear it to our own condemnation. And yet this is no good reason for not attending the public worship, that we may honour God, and know and do his will. The just inference, is to be careful how we hear, and how we behave in God’s house. In other things, where greater fear is, we have no fear. Few things, if any, are more dangerous to the souls of men, than riches; they corrupt the heart, and make men worldly. There is nothing

that we are more likely to receive unworthily, or that is more generally productive of "all evil." And yet, when do we see men refuse money or wealth on this account? Can you seriously think it more perilous to your soul to come to the Lord's supper, than to take upon you the stewardship of an estate or fortune? Let us not deceive ourselves; let these things be well considered. And may the Lord help us in all things so to judge, that finally we be not judged.

SERMON XVII.



ON WALKING IN LOVE.

A COMMUNION DISCOURSE.

Gen. xlv. 24.

See that ye fall not out by the way.

“THE patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him.” Their unnatural enmity against an innocent brother, could not debar him of the protection of his heavenly parent. As the martyr Stephen observes, “God delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him wisdom and favour in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor of all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt, and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.” Those same ten sons, who, moved with envy, had so cruelly sold their brother into Egypt, were soon driven by distress, into that very country, and to the same

Joseph, to buy corn for the famine of their houses. He rendered them good for evil; he filled their sacks, and took not their money. "At the second time, Joseph was made known unto his brethren." To their great confusion and utter astonishment, they found that he was advanced to high honour, and great power, and was in favour with God and man. What could they now expect, but the rod of judgment upon their guilty heads? This indeed they merited; but they found in that brother a heart bursting with tenderness and love. "He wept aloud, and said, I am Joseph your brother, doth my father yet live? Come near to me, I pray you. Be not angry or grieved with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life."

Here was a noble example of forgiveness and fraternal affection. The fame of this event was soon heard in the palace, "saying, Joseph's brethren are come, and it pleased Pharaoh well." The king rejoiced in such an opportunity of showing his regard to that good man, whose wisdom and favour with God, had brought a great blessing upon the kingdom. He requested the sons of Jacob, with all convenient speed, to return to Canaan, and bring their families, and all their father's household, down to Egypt, promising them abundance, even the good of all the land.

And now it was, that Joseph, anxious for their best good, and knowing the infirmity of human nature, gave them the short and very useful caution, contained in the text; "See that ye fall not out by the way." After the experience they had had of the evils and folly of envy, selfishness and contention, and God's patient goodness, and forbearing mercy,

he exhorts them now to love as brethren, and to dwell together in unity; to banish all selfishness and strife, and endeavour, to the utmost of their power, to make each other happy.

St. Stephen, in writing this history, as we read in the seventh chapter of the Acts, evidently applies it to the Jews who were then living. As the patriarchs had sold Joseph to the Gentiles, so had the Jews, moved with the like envy, sold Jesus, who was their brother according to the flesh, to the Roman government. And as in the one case, so in the other, what wicked, malicious men, intended for evil, and in them was very great evil, God meant for good. It was not without "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, that Jesus was taken, and by wicked hands, was crucified and slain." God made their wicked act subservient to his gracious designs in saving mankind from the spiritual famine. Christ, the Saviour, as the second and true Joseph, was also "sent before to preserve life." From that low state of bondage and death, into which the Jews, his brethren, had delivered Christ, he was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. Being rejected of his brethren, he has a church among the Gentiles. The spiritual "famine is sore in the land;" it is felt in Canaan. But through the providence of this true Joseph, "there is corn in Egypt," and thither must Israel go for the bread of life. The sons of Jacob must bow down and make obeisance to that brother whom they envied, or they must perish. Whatever indignation they may feel at the just application of those dreams of the prophets, who have foretold that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow," the

time is swiftly approaching, when those prophecies shall be fulfilled, "and so all Israel shall be saved;" for, as St. Stephen particularly remarks, "at the second time Joseph was made known unto his brethren." The time probably, is not far distant, when the Jews, as a nation, will be persuaded and "assured, that God has made that same Jesus whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ;" that he is indeed their Messiah; that he, whom they delivered to be treated as a slave, has all power given unto him in heaven and on earth.

But not to dwell on what is peculiar to the Jews, let us extend our view to that which is common to us of the Gentiles. Our Joseph has abundance of corn stored for all; he has the bread of eternal life. His body is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed. To whom else shall we go, or can we go, but to him, who alone "has the words of eternal life?" For a knowledge of God; for the doctrines of life; for the way of salvation, we must go to him; "neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." In the world there is a famine of spiritual sustenance; men run to and fro for the bread of life; for hope and peace; but if they seek in the world, they seek in vain. "Hungry and thirsty their soul fainths within them." "Behold the days come," saith the Lord, (by his prophet Amos,) "that I will send a famine into the land; not a famine of bread, and thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord;" "for man does not live by bread alone; but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

At the time when Christ appeared on the earth, this famine was most fatally distressing. The knowledge of God, and the way of life, which the nations of the earth had received by tradition from Noah and his sons, then, except among the Jews, was wholly lost. The Gentile nations, like the younger son in the parable, had spent their "portion of goods in riotous living. And when they had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." The true Joseph foresaw our distress; he has corn in store. God has sent him before to preserve life. "The blessings of his heavenly Father have prevailed unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills; they rest on the head of Joseph; on the head of him who was separate from his brethren." And though he has been envied and sold, and scourged and killed; though thousands of us daily crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame, "his bowels yearn upon his brethren;" his bosom swells with pity and the most tender compassion. "Father, forgive them," is his earnest prayer. To all he extends the most affectionate invitation: "Draw near to me, I pray you; I am Joseph your brother whom you sold. Doth my father yet live" in your hearts? "Come unto me, all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He teaches us that there are many years of the famine yet to come; but in his house is bread enough and to spare. He invites us to come to him where is abundance, and where we shall enjoy the good of all the land; all things shall be ours.

In the application of this subject, we, Christian friends, are of those to whom this true Joseph has made himself known; and whom he is teaching, and

soothing, and comforting, with the utmost tenderness and love. He makes known to us the purpose why God sent him into this world, not to condemn, but to save it. And though for our sins and ingratitude we feel, or ought to feel unworthy to be called his brethren, the sons of God, he is ready to receive us with full pardon, and bestow upon us the highest honour. He invites us with our families to come to him, and enjoy the abundance of his grace. "Regard not your stuff," is the language of his munificence. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." When in pursuit of such invaluable riches, it would be folly to encumber ourselves, and impede our progress, with things which are comparatively worthless. "My goods, saith the psalmist, are nothing unto me," compared with the riches of God's love and the joys of heaven. We are now, Christian friends, more especially in the presence of this affectionate brother. We are now assembled, like the sons of Jacob, to get food, even the bread of life. We have before us the most munificent pledge of his bounty; the most affectionate words of love and comfort; "Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." And not words only but food; a "feast of fat things, and wine on the lees." Here is "the strengthening of our souls by the body and blood of Christ, as our bodies are by bread and wine." He invites us to "come, for all things are now ready; nothing is wanting but the guests to sit down." Blessed be the God of mercy, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in this world of famine and want, we

may resort to his house where is "bread enough and to spare." "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" for "he filleth the hungry with good things," and none but those who confide in their own righteousness, will he "send empty away."

When indeed, we contrast God's mercy in Christ, with our own life of vanity and sin, we must feel as Joseph's brethren did when stung with remorse, when with humble penitence they confessed, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear." Often have we heard him warning us of the perils of sin, and inviting us to turn from our evil ways and live. We beheld "the anguish of his soul in the garden of Gethsemane;" we saw drops of blood falling from his limbs, while he was interceding with his heavenly Father on our behalf. We were witnesses of his sufferings while his mangled body was suspended between the heavens and the earth. Even then he besought us to weep not for him; his only concern was for us and our children. And yet, how little in our lives have we regarded his sufferings; how insensible have we been to his love! By our sins we have daily sold him to the Romans; mocked at his sufferings, beaten him with stripes, crowned him with thorns, and crucified him afresh. We ought now, and most deeply, to feel ourselves unworthy to be called sons; "unworthy to gather up the crumbs under his table." We must, unless totally insensible, we must "acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed.

The remembrance of them should be grievous unto us; the burden of them," were we left to bear it, would be "intolerable."

But "to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness." Though we have sinned, he is still our Advocate with the Father. He still addresses us in the accents of love and peace; "Let not your hearts be troubled;" "my grace is sufficient for you." He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not. "Let us, therefore, draw near in full assurance of faith." Let us not to our other sins, add this also, of rejecting his offered mercy; when all things are ready, let us not refuse to sit down.

"Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours;" ye who trust not in yourselves; who believe in Christ; who are grateful for his mercies, and desire to be his disciples and obtain his salvation, draw near with faith, and take to your comfort, the pledges of his love. While a sense of God's unspeakable goodness, in the work of our redemption, causes our hearts to melt within us, and to melt into penitence and love, let this be the language of our lips, and the sentiment of our souls; "We presume not to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies."

If, brethren, we have a thankful sense of God's mercy through Christ, we shall certainly desire and rejoice to obey his commands; it will be both our wish and delight to do his will. When we have partaken of his bounty, and shall be dismissed from his presence, acknowledged and accepted as his brethren;

and while we are on our way to our Father's house in the heavenly Canaan, what is the injunction which this our worthy, exalted brother, has particularly laid upon us? What does he especially require of us as of distinguished importance to his honour and our own best good? If there be any such command or injunction, it certainly claims our most awakened attention. It should be written before us in letters of gold; "it should be for a sign upon our hand, and as frontlets between our eyes." In our thoughts should it dwell as we retire to our rest, and awake in our minds at the earliest dawn.

And certainly, my brethren, there is such an injunction which our blessed Saviour has particularly given; it is what he often repeated and very expressly requires. It is a precept worthy of the friend who gave it, and is itself among the brightest tokens of his benevolence. It is comprised in the few words of our text; "See that ye fall not out by the way." This you well know, is the new commandment which our divine Master has given unto us, that we love one another, as he has loved us, that we also love one another. If you read his discourses, and especially if you read his very affectionate and consolatory discourse, after he had eaten the last passover with his disciples, and instituted the sacramental supper, you will see, and it will be strange if you do not feel, that love is the fulfilling of the whole law which the gospel teaches; that the end of the commandment is charity. Why did he wash his disciples' feet? To teach us that we should do to each other, as he has done to us; that we who are brethren in Christ, should dwell together in unity. By this chiefly, we

are known to be truly his disciples; by our having love one towards another.

Let us see then, that we fall not out by the way; that in this our pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan, we live and love as brethren. Surely, "if God so loved us" as to send his Son into the world to save our souls; if, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," "we ought also to love one another." It is the most proper, and it is the most happy return that can be made. "A good and a pleasant thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Let us retire from this house, after performing our duties in it, with hearts more deeply impressed with a sense of the love of Christ, and a more steadfast resolution to follow his example. Hear what he says to those who would be his disciples; "Ye call me Lord and Master; and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you." If that brother whom we sold; whom wickedly we have crucified and slain, can freely forgive us, can so comfort our hearts, and die to save our souls, how strangely ungrateful and wicked must we be, if we do fall out by the way. Well may he address us, in the language of his parable, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt (of ten thousand talents,) because thou desiredst me; shouldest thou not also have compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?"

Let love be among us without dissimulation, without envy, and without selfishness. Let us bear each the other's infirmities, knowing that we also are in the

flesh. "It must needs be that offences come;" and a wo is pronounced against him, "by whom the offence cometh." But our part is to pity rather than to punish the offender; for "vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord." Let it be the chief object of our lives, carefully and cordially to observe this our Saviour's precept. He is still occupied in our business; he ever lives to make intercession for us. "Go unto my brethren," (these are his words,) "and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." In his Father's house are many mansions; he has gone to prepare them for our reception. We are marching through Immanuel's ground; we are on the way to the heavenly Canaan; and our "feet should be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." We are to be kindly affectioned one towards another, with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality, and sympathizing in the joys and sorrows of our Christian friends. This is pure and undefiled religion; it is the best evidence that the Spirit which was in Christ is in us. The faith which saves us, is a "faith which worketh by love." This is the image of God which was lost, when man by transgression fell, and which is restored through faith in Christ. The best evidence "that we have passed from death unto life;" that our hearts are renewed by grace, is our loving the brethren; our desire and constant endeavour, as we have opportunity, to "do good unto all men, and especially unto them, who are of the household of faith." We never serve God more acceptably, nor have brighter assur-

ance of immortal blessedness, than when we "stand fast in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel." "A meek and quiet spirit, (though despised of man,) is, in the sight of God, of great price." Let such a spirit be in you; do nothing, say nothing, if possible, think nothing to another's injury. "Recompense to no man evil for evil; provide things honest in the sight of all men; if it be possible, live peaceably with all men."

Then shall God, even our own God, give us his blessing; and to him, for his unspeakable mercies, be rendered eternal praise. Amen.

SERMON XVIII.



THE WEDDING GARMENT.

Matt. xxii. 11, 12.

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless.

THOUGH the parables of our blessed Lord were accommodated to the state of the church then present, they were so wisely framed, as to be justly applicable, and generally useful to mankind in every age. And such especially, is the one from which this text is taken. In the fourteenth chapter of St. Luke, we learn that Christ had, on a previous occasion, spoken a parable of a certain man, who “made a great supper and bade many.” In this twenty-second of Matthew, it appears that he repeated the parable with some variation and additional circumstances. It is here a marriage feast which a certain king made for his son. In both parables, the servants were sent, with great kindness and affection,

to call those favoured persons who had been previously bidden ; and in both they unthankfully refused to come.

It is proposed in this discourse, to offer a practical comment on some parts of this parable, and chiefly on those circumstances which distinguish it from that in St. Luke's gospel. Every part of both, abounds with useful instruction, and merits our awakened attention and concern. The merciful goodness of God, as also his righteous retribution, are here set forth in a striking view. When they who had been invited sent back their first refusal, "again the king sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which are bidden, behold I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready ; come unto the marriage." The mercies of God, and his word preached, are a savour of life, or of death ; and if they do not lead men to repentance, harden them in sin. The latter effect is symbolized in those bidden guests. "They made light" of the king's friendship and the honour done them ; and "went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." And others, still more abandoned and ungrateful, "took his servants and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." But we are here taught also, that the Lord is mighty, not only to forgive, but to pour out indignation ; them who will not be reclaimed by his goodness, his vengeance will in the end destroy. "When the king heard of" this insufferable outrage, "he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city." Thus clearly did our Saviour forewarn the Jews of the impending judgments of the Almighty which

would soon follow upon their city and nation, in consequence of their hardness and accumulated transgression. Often would he have gathered their children with a parent's affection, but they would not; they killed the prophets, and stoned those who were sent unto them; they crucified their Saviour, and put his apostles to death. Behold in consequence, their house left unto them desolate.

But let us look to ourselves, to whom also the parable has a just application. By "the kingdom of heaven," is meant the preaching of the Saviour's gospel and the state of his religion. He compares it to a marriage feast which a king made for his son; and most apt is the comparison. The religion of Christ is a feast, as containing the most excellent food or refreshment for the soul. It has the purest sustenance, the richest viands, even the bread of eternal life. Who-soever drinks at this feast shall never thirst. The king who has so bountifully provided for his needy creatures this rich repast, is no other than God, the Sovereign Arbiter of the universe, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Son is the Lord our Redeemer. The spiritual union of believers with him is in the scriptures often and aptly compared to espousals. And accordingly this feast is called a marriage, comprising, in a word, the substance of a volume on the subject of our redemption. Christ, as a bridegroom, loves and protects his people: they are made one with him, and all that he has is theirs. As a bride the church takes his name; is united with him in the indissoluble bonds of interest and duty and affection; and she does him reverence, "calling him Lord."

When they, who were first invited, by their ungrateful refusal, proved themselves unworthy, the king would not that his provisions should be lost; he sent his servants to call others: "Go ye, therefore, into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests." Salvation in Jesus Christ is of God's free mercy, and the doors of the church, and the means of grace, are opened and offered to all; "whoever will, let him come." Our blessed Lord, in giving us commission to proclaim his word, bids us to be liberal of his bounty: "Preach the gospel to every creature:" "Freely have you received; freely give." To God alone does it appertain to search the heart and to know with what intent men profess religion. His ministers, must open the doors of his visible sanctuary to those who knock; and all who appear to be sincerely desirous of entering God's kingdom, we must receive; and sometimes of course it may happen that we give admission as did the servants in the parable, to the bad with the good. Though it is much to be desired, we cannot reasonably hope, that every one who partakes of the sacraments of Christ, will possess the inward graces necessary to a true Christian. The enemy will sow tares among the wheat, which cannot be separated till the great harvest at the end of the world.

But though "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily," let it never be forgotten that there is an omniscient eye, "unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid." The Lord

“knows what is in man,” and the time is fast approaching when “he shall gather out of his kingdom all things which offend, and them who do iniquity.” Accordingly it is further stated in this parable, that “when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment.” Through affectation of singularity, or a pride in his own dress, or more probably, through carelessness and disrespect, he was not clad as decency and the rules of the feast required. The servants, it may be, had not noticed this dishonour; but a master’s eye is not to be thus easily deceived. He demands the reason of this unsuitable appearance: “Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless.”

The wedding-garment, spiritually applied, is a Christian spirit; repentance and faith; sincerity and truth. Not every one who saith to Jesus, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the glorified state of his kingdom. It will not avail us to the attainment of life immortal, that we have eaten and drunk in his presence, and have participated in the privileges of his saints on earth, except our hearts are renewed by faith, and our lives conformed to his will. They who come to him unworthily, and from evil motives or want of consideration, are cast out and numbered with those who come not at all.

It will be natural here and not unprofitable, to inquire how these guests obtained their wedding-garments. They are represented as poor people and destitute, found in the highways and persuaded to come in to the feast. Could it reasonably be expected, or was it indeed possible, that all or any of them should furnish themselves with suitable raiment? Can those

we meet in the public roads be supposed to carry with them rich clothing suited for such an occasion? Do you see the justice of condemning him who was not spiritually clad, when apparently it was not in his power, when he had not the time or the means necessary to obtain the garments required?

This will be easily obviated, by considering the ancient customs of the eastern nations. Among us the fashions of dress are so constantly changing that it is as uncommon as it would be unwise to store up many changes of raiment. But then and there it was otherwise. The form of their garments continued long without change, and it was considered an essential part of their magnificence and wealth, to have their wardrobes filled with many rich habits: and the quantity of this kind of treasure which they often possessed, to us seems almost incredible. In allusion to this fact, Job speaks of those who "heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay." The prophet Zechariah, in speaking of the spiritual riches of God's people in future times, in language conformed to the notions of wealth which then prevailed, describes it as "gold and silver and apparel in great abundance." Hence too our Saviour speaks of moth as well as rust corrupting the treasures of this world. St. James, addressing himself to the avaricious, who hoard up wealth to lie useless, says, "your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten, and your gold and silver is cankered." Among their treasures they had stores of raiment perishing, while the poor, who had laboured in their service, were suffering.

When the Romans conquered those eastern nations, they enriched themselves with these spoils. One of

their generals, who had served in those parts, being asked if he could furnish a hundred of those habits for the theatre, answered that he had five thousand of them. It appears also, both from sacred and profane history, to have been a custom for princes and others, at superb entertainments, to present their guests with changes of raiment; and to give them on other occasions. Thus Joseph gave them to his brethren at a feast; and Pharaoh gave them to the same brethren. Samson at his marriage-feast put forth a riddle, and to him who would expound it, he promised thirty changes of raiment. And among the presents sent by the king of Syria to the prophet Elisha were ten changes of raiment.

Thus what seems a difficulty in the text is wholly obviated, and more than obviated; the parable appears more beautiful and more instructive. For we may justly infer that each of these guests is supposed to have a garment, suitable to the occasion, presented to him, without which we cannot see how any of them could have been suitably clad. He whose appearance was offensive, had no doubt a wedding-garment offered him, which, for some unworthy motive, he refused, or neglected certainly to wear. And accordingly it is not said that he did not possess, but that he had not on a wedding-garment. There was no doubt an abundance of suitable raiment provided for all; and the fault of this one was not his neglect to make or to purchase it, which was not in his power; but in refusing to put it on; in preferring to appear indecent and offensive. And therefore when interrogated why he appeared there without suitable apparel, "he was speechless," he had no excuse to offer.

All these circumstances are remarkably applicable to our state, and our salvation in Jesus Christ; and without insisting on what some may question, that our Saviour intended in this extent to apply them, they may well call our attention to the doctrines of his cross. We know that the scriptures have concluded all under sin; they teach us that our nature is corrupt and without spiritual health; that we cannot of ourselves become righteous, nor merit salvation by our own works. "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." We are saved only in Jesus Christ; who, by his grace, finds us in the streets of sin, straying in the broad way of perdition; poor by nature, and destitute of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. By his word, and by his ministering servants, he calls us to return to our heavenly Father's house, where is bread enough and to spare; to a "feast of fat things, and of wine on the lees;" to spiritual comforts; to heavenly refreshments. At this blessed feast "all things are ready; nothing is wanting but the guests to sit down;" every thing necessary to comfort our hearts, and strengthen our souls to eternal life, is liberally provided. Not food only, but raiment; not only is there opened to our view spiritual life and immortal blessedness, but a Saviour is given, who is the propitiation for our sins, through whose grace we are sanctified, and through whose merits we obtain justification and peace with God. In the blessed wardrobe of his righteousness is a treasure inexhaustible, of raiment more precious than the finest linen; more beautiful than Syrian purple; more fragrant than the perfumes of Arabia.

“All thy garments,” says the psalmist, addressing himself to this King of saints, “smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia out of ivory palaces.” In the Revelation, these robes of the Saviour’s righteousness, in which his saints are clad, are represented as being of the purest white; we are justified by faith, and made the righteousness of God in him. What is required of us is, in the language of this parable, to put on this garment by repentance and faith. And accordingly, we are elsewhere exhorted to put on the Lord Jesus Christ; to put off the old man, and to put on the new. In the like figurative language does the prophet Isaiah address the church; “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem.” And certainly, no similitude can better illustrate the scriptural doctrine of free grace, and the nature and necessity of gospel obedience, than this, of putting on raiment freely offered us, and suitable to be worn at a marriage feast. These poor people, called in from the highways, were totally incapable of providing such costly dainties and superb refreshments; nor could they furnish themselves with wedding-garments. But they were all able to come when graciously invited; they could eat of the provisions when all things were ready; and they could put on raiment which was freely provided.

Thus has a wise and merciful God adapted his grace which bringeth salvation to our state and need. The blessing is ours; the glory his. It is of the Lord’s merciful goodness that we are called to a knowledge of his grace, and faith in Christ. We should ever remain in spiritual ignorance; still should

we sit in darkness and the shadow of death, but for "that light which cometh down from heaven, and lighteth every man who cometh into the world." And as some in the parable, when invited, refused to come; so some may, and many do turn a deaf ear to the word preached; they shut their eyes to the Sun of Righteousness, and refuse a compliance with the terms of mercy and peace. Such are they whom our Lord thus tenderly reproves; "Ye will not come to me, that I might give you life." Many there are, who, in the language of the parable, make light of the invitation, "and go their way, one to his farm, and another to his merchandise." But whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear, it is of God's goodness that they are called; nor does he say to his people, "seek ye my face in vain."

And from the same fountain of goodness is the heavenly feast, the precious things provided. As in the parable the poor so graciously called in from the highway, could not have prepared for themselves such a banquet, less, if less may be, can we prepare or attain or procure for ourselves, the "things hoped for;" the blessings promised to the faithful. We are totally unable to raise ourselves from the dead; to stand as righteous before the judgment-seat of God, and to enter into the joy of the Lord. Christ alone is the resurrection and the life; and he alone has brought life and immortality to light. But as men may refuse to eat when food is provided and set before them, so may they neglect this great salvation; they may, it is too evident, reject the Saviour; despise the means of grace, and "turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Many will not lay hold on

eternal life, nor strive to enter in at the straight gate; but will continue on the highroad to perdition. Some happily, will labour for the bread of eternal life, but others will prefer the meat which perisheth.

And the like is true of the wedding-garment. "How can a man be just with God?" What sinner can make an acceptable sacrifice for his own transgression? Who of all the corrupt descendants of Adam, can change his own heart and become righteous before God? We cannot be justified for our own merits, nor restore ourselves to peace and favour with God. What act, or word, or thought, can we do or name, which does not come short of that purity and perfection which God's law requires? No; the Lord is our righteousness; we must look to the Saviour's wardrobe; we must put on those white garments, which "smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia." He who has "appeared once on earth to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," is "the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe." It is by the grace of God that we are what we are; it is by the Spirit of Christ that our hearts are renewed; that we are created again unto good works; that we are all, or any thing, which Christians should be. From him "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed." Without him, we can do nothing that is pleasing to God. By his grace preventing, his word instructing, and his means assisting, he so works in you to will and to do, that the glory and praise of all you are, and all you do of good, belong to him.

But though this wedding-garment; this spirit of piety, faith, and love, is required of men, and is

offered to them in the gospel of Christ, one in the parable, and many, we may fear, in real life, refuse or at least neglect to put it on. Some prefer their own dress; they trust in their own righteousness, and expect to be justified for their own good deeds. Some even contend that no such raiment is offered. They deny that Christ has made expiation for sin; or that we are saved by grace; or that men need any righteousness but their own. Many, we may fear, who name themselves of Christ, do not truly put their trust in him as the only Saviour. To him, who (whatever may be his profession,) denies the doctrines of grace, and does not submit to the righteousness of God, may the Lord justly, and he will assuredly say, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment?"

Let us not then dismiss this subject without some improvement. We are taught first, the folly and the peril of making light of the invitation. Many seem to suppose that the only danger is in coming to Christ unworthily; that if they make no profession of religion, they shall give no offence; as if hypocrisy were not only a great, but the only sin. Is such the language and the doctrine of this parable? Remember, and let it, as you regard your immortal well being, be duly considered, that if the one who appeared disqualified was cast out, the king was not less displeased with the many who made light of the invitation and refused to come. We offend God when we hear the gospel with unconcern. If, in his merciful goodness, he calls us to a knowledge of his grace, and his unspeakable love to us in Jesus Christ, dare we or can we make light of it? Though the first

messengers are rejected, he sends again: "I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage." This is indeed love; he has sent his Son into the world, not to condemn, but to save it; he has made propitiation for our sins, and for us has triumphed over death and the grave; and the divine Spirit is given to aid and to comfort us! "All things are ready;" "the Spirit and the bride say come; and whoever will," may come. Such mercy is revealed, such grace is offered, and such means are given, that every mouth shall be stopped; every sinner be speechless, and he that believeth not, shall justly be condemned.

And yet, as our Lord says in the conclusion, though so "many are called, but few are chosen." But a part, and we may fear but a small proportion of those who hear this word with their ears, have it grafted in their hearts, and show its fruits in their lives. Dreadful, we cannot doubt, will be the speechless confusion of those hypocrites, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, when at the final judgment, the King of saints shall view the guests; and is that judgment of unworthiness less to be dreaded, which he will pass on those who refuse to hearken? Will he not debar such of a spiritual, as he once did of a temporal Canaan, and "swear, in his wrath, they shall not enter into my rest?"

At present, we can indeed, make light of these things, and go our way, to the business and amusements of life; "but the day of the Lord will come." That the natural sun will rise again to enlighten this horizon, is not so sure, as that for all these things

God will bring us into judgment. You may "sleep on now and take your rest," but a trumpet shall soon sound, at which the dead shall awake. "Awake (now,) thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," and life, and peace. Behold he stands at the door and knocks; now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Eternity hangs on the present hour; "hearken, and your soul shall live."

And let us not forget that "we have not power of ourselves to help ourselves; that our sufficiency is of God;" and that "we are accounted righteous before him, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not for our own works and deservings." Let his merits be our trust, his Spirit our support, his example our guide, and his righteousness our glory. The garment with which Christians, in the figurative language of the scriptures, are to be clothed, is the merit of our Saviour, who was made sin for us, that we may be made the righteousness of God in him. This is put on by faith, which renews the heart with piety and love, and produces the fruit of religious zeal and a godly life. To Christ, as we have seen, we are wholly indebted for this costly raiment; he it is who "clothes us with the garment of salvation." He is both the author and the finisher of that faith, by which the heart is renewed, and we are justified and saved. But the scriptures do not consider us as passive merely in believing; we are positively required; we are commanded to believe. Faith is enjoined upon us as a duty; and the want of it is condemned as the greatest of sins. The wedding-garment is provided for us;

but we must put it on. The revelation and the evidence of the truth, and all the necessary means of grace, are set before us; "all things are ready." To "put on this beautiful garment," is the great concern of a Christian's life. We are more and more to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and to "be renewed day by day." Though we have been converted to God, and have been blessed with some happy degree of sanctification, we ought "daily to proceed in all virtue and godliness of living," and to "adorn the doctrine of our God and Saviour in all things." Self-righteousness we must wholly disclaim; we can only put on Christ. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might:" let him who would be saved in Christ, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Let us constantly endeavour, (like St. Paul,) "to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Finally, brethren, to comfort our hearts, to animate our hopes, and to strengthen our hands to labour, let us meditate, with pleasing anticipation and holy joy, on the unspeakable glories of that happy day of perfect redemption, when the saints of God, in full fruition of glory and peace, shall, as St. John saw in the Revelation, be for ever received to the marriage of the Lamb, "even into the joy of their Lord;" in the perfect consummation of beatitude and bliss; when they shall be fully clothed in white garments, in the spotless robes of the Saviour's righteousness. Then shall we join the joyful acclamations of the

heavenly host, who “cease not, day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

And for that glorious day of consummation and bliss, may the Lord fit and prepare us all, through the riches of his love in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the blessed Spirit, be rendered immortal praise. Amen.

SERMON XIX.



ON THE NECESSITY OF A RELIGIOUS REGARD TO OUR SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST.

Luke x. 41, 42.

Thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful.

WHEN we contemplate the amiable character of the person to whom these words of our Saviour were addressed, it would seem that very few could less need the reproof which they imply. But he perfectly knew the hearts and the wants of men, what we are and what we need. As the physician of our souls, he was equally wise and faithful; he came into the world not to please, but to save mankind; and his doctrines were accommodated, not to our humours, but to our wants.

As he was passing with his disciples through the country, dispensing, “as his manner was,” works of mercy and words of life, “it came to pass that he entered into a certain village, and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had

a sister, called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered with much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

Here was a scene highly interesting and instructive. For this happy family, consisting of these two sisters, and their brother Lazarus, Jesus their Saviour had a particular friendship. He entered their hospitable mansion, and as he never neglected the business of his ministry, was soon engaged in imparting religious knowledge to those who had ears to hear. Martha, who was mistress in the family, received him courteously, and was very naturally anxious to honour her divine guest and entertain his disciples with the best that her house would afford. Having undertaken more than she could well do, and (as is too common on like occasions,) more than was necessary, she was burdened and perplexed with the hurry of her business and the multiplicity of her cares. But Mary seems to have given herself little or no concern with the household affairs, nor at this time, with any worldly things. Her mind was intent on things of eternal moment. Humbly seated at the feet of her beloved Master, she listened with eager attention to his words and doctrine. Regardless, at the moment, of what the body needs, she was intent only on feasting her mind; she was regarding the things of a better world; she was receiving the bread

which cometh down from heaven, and nourisheth to eternal life.

One fault naturally produces another. Martha, having encumbered herself unseasonably, and too much with worldly cares, is exposed to other temptations; her mind is disturbed with improper feelings. She is offended that her sister takes no part in entertaining the guests; and even expostulates with the Saviour himself, for permitting her to be idle. So easily do some sins beset us; so suddenly, without constant vigilance, are we hurried into unchristian conduct; so much more readily do we see another's faults than our own. These sisters, I doubt not, were both good and truly religious; but none are faultless; we are all in peril. While Martha blamed her sister's neglect of worldly cares, she did not, as she ought, consider how profitably Mary was spending her time; nor did she think of her own folly in being so worldly at such a season, and suffering her mind to be agitated with unkind reflections, when her whole soul should have been filled with gratitude and love. Suppose that Mary was at the time too neglectful of her share in the household labours, Martha was neglecting what is infinitely more important. For choosing this better part, Mary was not blamed by her divine Master. She was not, we may believe, deficient in hospitality, nor in any social duties; and God forbid, that any one should be encouraged, by a misunderstanding of her example, ever to neglect them. She knew, she felt that the things which engaged her attention, were of eternal moment; she knew that there is a time for all things. It was no common visiter who honoured their dwell-

ing, and condescended to sit under their roof; it was a messenger from heaven; it was the Son of God, sent into the world to teach men the way of life and salvation. They had a guest who was neither pleased nor honoured by the formal civilities of fashionable life; by delicate food, or splendid festivity. His meat and drink were to do his heavenly Father's will; he was honoured most by hearing his words and obeying his precepts. At other times, and on ordinary occasions, Mary no doubt would have been reasonably careful, and engaged in all the affairs of hospitality; but to have encumbered her mind with worldly affairs, when Christ was the preacher, and her own salvation the theme, would have been foolish. Such an opportunity for her soul's benefit, she might never again be blessed with; so great, so wise a teacher, might never again come under their roof.

Considering these things, how gentle and how instructive was our Lord's reproof. Casting his eyes with tender compassion upon the fretful, murmuring sister, "Martha, Martha," he says, repeating her name to fix her attention, and to signify the importance of what he was about to say, "thou art careful and troubled about many things;" you have much business on your hands; you are deeply engaged in your domestic concerns; your earnest desire hospitably to entertain your guests, cannot be questioned; but these things which so very much engross your attention are temporal; they are not all necessary; they deserve not the trouble which you bestow upon them. They divert your thoughts from your better interest; they make you forgetful of things of far greater moment. "One thing is needful;" there is

one concern which is indispensably necessary to your eternal welfare, which cannot be neglected without great hazard. "And Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Your sister, whom so inconsiderately you blame, is acting the wiser part; she is regarding things not perishable, but everlasting; she is providing that which is meat indeed, and drink indeed. She is laying up treasures in heaven; she wisely prefers that eternal inheritance, of which she shall not, by any power of the universe, be debarred.

Such, brethren, I conceive is the sense of the text. The diligence and hospitality of Martha, are not in themselves to be condemned. But so far as she prided herself in her hospitality, (which, we may fear, is sometimes, in like circumstances, the case;) so far as she neglected her religion and the concerns of her soul, for unnecessary worldly cares; and so far as she was influenced in what she said, by unkind resentment or any evil passion, she was undoubtedly in fault. Our part is not to judge of her merits, but to profit from her example.

What we are chiefly taught in the words selected for the text, is the necessity of religion; the supreme importance of attending to the things which concern the soul and our future state. Whatever may be our state and occupation in this life, and however diligent and honestly industrious we may be in our proper business and professions, it is not only wise, but necessary to our well being, that we regard our spiritual state, our duty to God, and our everlasting salvation. Here we have no abiding place; we are pilgrims travelling to a permanent habitation. We need but

little here, and that little will soon be needless. Many of our temporal wants are falsely so called, and but imaginary. Some things are called necessities of life, which are not really necessary, and were they added to what we possess, they might render us eventually more wretched. But the salvation which is of God; the pardon of our sins; our acceptance with him through a righteous Saviour, and our final justification in the day of judgment, every one has need of. On this depends our immortal welfare.

This then, is our subject; from this most interesting declaration of the Saviour of the world, confirmed, as it evidently is, by the whole volume of the sacred scriptures, we are now called to make improvement. The substance of what the text, as connected with what precedes it, teaches, may, I think, be comprised in three propositions: That the performance of moral duties cannot, in itself, afford any one a well grounded hope of blessedness in a future state! That religion, or a particular attention to spiritual things, is necessary to our eternal salvation. And that worldly cares when unseasonable or immoderate, tend more to endanger, than to save the soul. My object will be, assisted, I trust, by your attention and your prayers, to impress these truths upon our hearts, and apply them to the regulation of our practice.

I. There is a notion which prevails among men to a great extent, and very much prevents the increase of true religion, that if they are moral in their lives, their souls will be saved. To such, we might indeed answer, as our Saviour did answer one of them, "This do and thou shalt live." If men were per-

fectly good and righteous, no other thing would be needful to their justification; they would stand before God in their own merits. They who are whole, need not a physician; and Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. But the gospel teaches, and we who preach it, must consider that all men are sinful, and by God's righteous laws, justly condemned; that the infinite Jehovah, in his merciful goodness, has appointed the mediation of Jesus Christ, as the only way to pardon, peace, and life; that our justification, our reconciliation with God, and hope of future blessedness, are to be obtained through faith in this divine Teacher, at whose feet Mary sat, and whose doctrines she chose as the better part, the true wisdom.

It is plausible indeed, to say, nor shall we deny, that he serves God best, whose life is most virtuous and moral. And some will falsely infer, that Martha was better employed in works of kindness and hospitality, than her sister in listening to a discourse. This inference would not be false, if our good morals would bear the scrutiny of God's righteous laws, and justification can be obtained without faith in the Saviour. But who of us that duly considers the state of his affections, or the tenor of his conduct, will venture to build his hopes on this sandy foundation? Nothing certainly is more true, than that in walking uprightly, we please God. No works can be more acceptable to the holy Author of our being, than good works; but, till our works are all good and perfectly good, one thing more must be needful. We find ourselves in this state of sin and darkness, with no power of ourselves to help ourselves. God in his

revealed word, has proposed to us life eternal, through faith in the righteousness of his Son. If we choose rather our own righteousness, and hope, that what we do will commend us to God, we are fallen from grace, or we reject his gospel. But if we are guilty offenders; if our best deeds are imperfect, and partake of sin; if we are depraved, and weak, and mortal, with no spiritual health appertaining to our nature, and present state; if we feel the need, and desire the attainment of that salvation which is of God, it is our duty, and should be our first care, to repent of our deeds, rather than trust in them.

St. James indeed tells us, that “pure and undefiled religion, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one’s self unspotted from the world;” from which it would seem, that works of benevolence and purity of life, are what God requires as necessary to salvation, and that these are the “one thing needful.” And so, in a certain sense, they are; they who would be saved in Jesus Christ, must be careful to maintain good works, and without holiness or sanctification, no one, though he believes, shall see the Lord. But it is to be considered, that St. James, in the passage just cited from his epistle, speaks of religion with regard to its fruits, and the evidence of a right faith; but not of the root from which those fruits spring, and the means by which they are brought to maturity. “Pure and undefiled religion,” in a more proper sense, or in respect to its principles and the means of grace, consists of faith in Christ, a knowledge of his word, and a devout obedience to his laws and ordinances. These are made needful, that our hearts may be renewed, that

we may trust in God and live to his glory. But, as we said, the notion prevails, and it seems to be a frequent, and we have reason to fear, a fatal error of some who call themselves Christians, that if they live sober and regular lives; avoid scandalous vices, and discharge the common duties of life, they have a good conscience towards God; that this alone, or chiefly, will secure their eternal salvation. But is this that change of heart and newness of life which the scriptures speak of, and the Saviour requires? Does his gospel propose to us remission of sins, and eternal life on the merits of a little more than common prudence and regularity in our lives? Does it not conclude all under sin, and require of all, the same repentance, and faith, and charity? No one, certainly, has a right faith and is truly religious, whose life is not, according to the current language of the world, virtuous or moral. But if as Christians, we build on this foundation; if we reckon the good deeds that we have done, and the vices that we have escaped, as the ground of our hope, we have wrong ideas of Christianity. A holy life which is produced by faith, and hope, and charity in the heart, is certainly an evidence that God works within us, and that we are truly Christians. But if we are truly convinced that we are sinners, our own righteousness will not be named. You may be decent and respectable in your social intercourse; you may be industrious and useful as members of the community, and amiable in the relations of domestic life; but does this entitle you to eternal salvation, even to that salvation which is of God through faith; not of works lest any man should boast? Careful you may be, and

troubled about many things; “but one thing is needful.”

II. And let this conduct our meditations more particularly to our second proposition; That religion, or a particular attention to spiritual things, is necessary to our salvation. The interest of the soul is a subject of distinct concern; so very much so indeed, that becoming truly religious, is, in scriptural language, and in a certain sense, forsaking the world. We are said to be new born; old things to be done away, and all to become new. “Love not the world,” (says the disciple whom Jesus loved,) “neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” Hence it is, that the just are said to live by faith. The Christian’s belief in God, and trust in the Saviour’s righteousness, becomes a new principle of spiritual life; he uses the world as not abusing it; he lives not to himself, but to God. This religious principle, this piety of the heart, is a thing needful. We must trust not in the world, nor in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ. Through him as our refuge, we are to flee from the wrath to come; to lay hold on eternal life. We need that our sins should be pardoned; that our hearts should be sanctified, and that our souls should be saved. We need a well grounded hope, a scriptural assurance, that when the great judge of quick and dead shall award to the fallen race of Adam their final doom, we shall stand. But we cannot, in our

own strength, or by our own righteousness, obtain this hope, or cleanse our heart and purify our conscience from the defilement of sin; nor can we conquer death and rise triumphant from the grave. Not all the multiplicity of our worldly cares can secure to us an acquittal in the day of judgment. Our worldly cares are not strictly necessary; whether we are in joy or in sorrow, our short space of time here, will soon pass away; our joys will be gone, and our sorrows no more remembered. But the interest of a never-ending eternity is awfully serious; and this interest is not to be secured by worldly serving. I speak not of our works which are wrought through faith; we are to show our faith by our works, and especially by works of mercy, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. If we have faith which will produce this, we have the thing needful. But this faith we cannot hope to possess, without a particular and serious attention to spiritual things. All your labour for things temporal, will not secure the things eternal.

When too, you find by experience that your bodies need so much care, do you believe that the soul may, without great folly, be neglected; that heaven and immortality can be attained without care and diligence? With all our pride, and wealth, and honours, we are sinful, needy, and wretched creatures, and often does it happen that our worldly cares increase our wretchedness. A merciful God has provided for your greatest need; he has given his own Son to be the way, and the truth, and the life, and the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes. The way of salvation in Jesus Christ

is one entire system, standing on its own peculiar foundation; it originates in divine love, it is devised by infinite wisdom, and it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Unless we receive it as God requires, we virtually reject it. There is no spiritual life, but in the Saviour; there is no access to the Father, but through the Son. If we choose the world for our portion, we shall perish with it. We have a way opened to “honour, glory, and immortality,” and it is necessary that we sometimes sit, like Mary, at Jesus’ feet; it is necessary, at some times and at suitable seasons, to divest ourselves of the cumbrous load of terrestrial cares, however urgently they may press upon us, and seriously attend to religious concerns. God has given a season for every thing, and a time for every purpose under heaven. The duties of life are not to be neglected; but the concerns of the soul, the knowledge of Christ, the work of salvation, is absolutely needful to your eternal welfare.

Nor do we make void the law through faith; the gospel of Christ does not make light of moral goodness. On the contrary, it shows the fatal consequence of departing from it, and vindicates the justice and the immutability of God’s laws. It reveals the only way in which a sinner can be accounted just before God. Its declared object, and its practical tendency, are to renew the heart with holy affections; to reclaim the wandering soul from the ways of sin, and by the most urgent and influential motives, to produce in us all virtue and godliness of living. Faith establishes the law, both in theory and practice. No men live more holy, none are more faithful and diligent in

every duty of life, than they who believe in Christ, and trust in his righteousness.

III. Our third proposition, implied in the text, is also worthy of serious consideration; That worldly cares, which are intemperate and unseasonable, tend to endanger, rather than to save the soul. Their effect on the more worldly of these sisters, shows us what every Christian may justly fear. From her much serving, she could give no attention to what her Saviour taught, and her mind was disturbed with passions inconsistent with his doctrine. A too great anxiety for temporal things, is a sin which the most generally, and most easily besets us. Continual vigilance is necessary, to prevent their entangling our minds, exciting uncharitable feelings, and keeping us from religious duties. On the weekly return of the Lord's day, it is too evident that many are so cumbered with worldly thoughts and worldly cares, that they either wholly neglect public worship and religious meditations, or if they outwardly give their attendance, their minds are so distracted with these temporal concerns, that they make no spiritual improvement. In many, very many unhappy instances, all attention to religion is excluded by worldly cares, as our Lord has shown in his parable of the great supper. They who are bidden cannot come; and why not? Because they would attend to their farms, and their merchandise, and their worldly connexions. Thousands who know and feel that they ought to attend to their spiritual state, and persuade themselves that they shall do it, find no convenient time.

They would become disciples of the Saviour; they would be baptized, they would come to the holy communion; but they are waiting for a season when their minds shall be less entangled in temporal things and more disposed to pious meditations. But when is this ever likely to happen, except they reluctantly determine to lay aside their much serving, and sit, as occasions require, at Jesus' feet. Many would devote more time to serious inquiries; to reading the scriptures and other religious books; to hearing sermons and pious discourses; to public prayers and private devotions: but they find that the world, like Pharaoh, grows more rigorous in its exactions; their task-masters allow no time for respite. And much of the time which we do devote to religious exercise is rendered, in a great degree, unprofitable by the unseasonable intrusion of worldly thoughts. Of how many of those who profess to lead a religious life, may it, in the Saviour's words be said, that "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches," like briars and thorns in a field of corn, "choke the word, and they become unfruitful."

Knowing then the importance of this one thing needful; of a well grounded hope of salvation in Jesus Christ, take heed that you do not, by an undue regard to temporal things, forfeit and lose the true riches. If you cannot do all which your hands find to do, let not that be neglected which is of all the most necessary. Remember that the friendship of the world may be enmity with God, and that the pursuit of the world is not the way to heaven. We are born in sin, the children of wrath, the heirs of perdition. If you are God's children, it must be by

adoption in Jesus Christ. Through him, and according to his word, must you seek reconciliation. Suffer not to enter your heart this vain confidence, that you have lived well; that you are engaged in honest business; that your life is decently moral; that you are daily doing good for yourself and others, and therefore it is unnecessary to spend your time in religious duties; that nothing more for you is needful. God, who knows the heart, has declared that you, in common with all men, are a sinner. He has provided one Saviour, and opened but one way of salvation to you and to all mankind. To whom else can you go, but to him who only has the words of eternal life? The gospel of salvation knows not of any privileged orders; any exemptions from that sentence of condemnation, which has passed upon men, because all have sinned. There is no royal way to heaven. The same blood was shed for you and for the beggar who lies at your gate; and the faith, and hope, and charity required of one, are necessary to all. Whatever then may be your state in the world, though your cares are many, and your occupation ever so important, it is no good reason, and let it be no excuse for neglecting religious concerns. Your peace with God, your salvation in Jesus Christ, is important as eternity is durable. Without this, though you gain the whole world, you gain nothing. With this, you are infinitely rich; "all things are yours." "Marvel not that we say unto you, ye must be born again." We shall be unfaithful stewards of God's mysteries if we do not teach, and insist with all long-suffering and doctrine, that the most upright moralist, if he would save his soul, must by prayer and searching

the scriptures, and by religious duties, seek an interest in the only Saviour; he must obtain a new heart and a new spirit, disposed to honour God and love his fellow-men. And to be faithful, we must also continually warn the most steadfast Christians to take heed how they cumber their minds with too much serving. Our Saviour's language is strong and awakening: "Take no thought for the morrow; seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Take care that religious duties are never, from the love of the world, neglected. If you yield to this weakness, the tempter is gaining ground, other sins will follow. Knowing our frailty, let us not cease daily and most devoutly to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

SERMON XX.



ON WORSHIPPING GOD IN TRINITY.

2 Cor. xiii. 14.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

It was not without reason that Zophar demanded of Job, “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” Some of the divine attributes may reasonably be inferred from our knowledge of his works. That he is wise, and good, and mighty, and that he ought to be worshipped and obeyed, our natural reason may in some degree discover from the works of creation. But what particularly is the Lord’s will respecting us; by what name or names he may fitly be distinguished; what kind of homage he requires or will accept; what we may fear from his justice, or hope from his mercy, and how we may draw nigh unto him in assurance of faith, we can learn only from a supernatural revelation. And such a revelation we have in the holy scriptures. To this sacred fountain

of light and truth must we repair for spiritual knowledge; and according as we deviate from this unerring standard, we “worship we know not what.” Here we are taught to believe in the “Father, of whom are all things, and we of him;” and in his only begotten Son, the “one Lord by whom are all things, and we by him.” Though “in the beginning he was with God, and was God, he was made flesh and dwelt among us.” And we are taught also to believe in the Holy Ghost, the eternal Spirit of God. And that it is only through the Son, as “the Lord our righteousness,” and by this divine Spirit helping our infirmities, that we have access unto the Father.

Under these names, and others of like distinction, are made known to us the being and attributes of the Deity, so far certainly as is necessary to our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. These Persons, (as from the defect of language we call them,) inseparably existing as one God, are the object of our religious faith; which faith we solemnly profess in baptism; these names are in the seal of the Christian covenant. To them, throughout the scriptures, we find titles and ascriptions of divine honour and adoration, of which the present text is an instance: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.” “This is a prayer to the three Persons of the Divine Being, for their respective blessings in the covenant of redemption.” These blessings which are essentially necessary to the holiness and happiness of God’s people, does the apostle invoke upon the Corinthian Christians. And in this

view, as it is a prayer addressed to the three Persons of the Christian's God, is this text proposed to your present consideration. I purpose, the Lord permitting, to discourse on this subject, of thus distinguishing in our religious worship, the several Persons of the Godhead. I shall enter no farther into the doctrine of the Trinity, than this subject requires. We shall not, indeed, have room in the present discourse, to state much of the authority which we have in God's word, for worshipping the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is proposed merely to show something of the fitness and apostolic authority for addressing our homage distinctly to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; in what sense, and with what doctrinal views we should do it; and to show the unreasonableness of some objections which are made to this manner of worship.

I. First, then, let us turn our attention to the word of God, and to the doctrine and the practice of the inspired writers. In the relation of existence, the Father is first, as this title implies. The Son ranks the second. The Holy Ghost as proceeding from, or as being "the Spirit of the Father;" and "the Spirit of Christ," is the third; and so, in the form of baptism, we are commanded to use them. But we cannot from this, infer inequality in their nature or glory; for the apostles address, or speak of them sometimes one, sometimes another first, indifferently. In the text, "the Lord Jesus Christ" is first addressed.

That in regard to the essentials of Divinity, these Persons are equal, is further evident in the scriptures,

from honour and worship being rendered sometimes to the three, as in the text, and in the form of baptism, which is the most solemn act of worship that can be performed. But in more instances, two only are addressed. As by St. Paul to the Ephesians; "Grace be to you from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Here the Father is first mentioned; but the same grace and peace are implored from each. So to the Thessalonians; "Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father, comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work." Here "our Lord Jesus Christ" is first invoked; but divine power is equally ascribed to both. In very many places, one Person only is addressed, the Father; as when St. Paul writes to the Ephesians; "the Father of glory give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of Christ." The Son; as, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." And the Holy Ghost; as, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ." The connexion shows that the divine Spirit is the Lord here addressed. In our public worship, we ought, as indeed the church directs us, to "do likewise."

We should also follow the example of the inspired writers, in ascribing to each Person the attributes and the mercies, which, in the work of redemption, are to each respectively more appropriate. Thus, in our text to the first Person is ascribed love. "The love of the Father" is the source of all blessings. He so loved the world as to send his only Son to be our Saviour. "Herein is love; not that we

loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." To the second Person, grace is attributed. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," is a phrase which often occurs. It is through him, as our Mediator and Redeemer, that all mercies flow. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Communion or fellowship, is a distinguishing mercy of the third Person; "The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." The word signifies a common union, or joint participation. "The communion of saints," is their fellowship; their bond of union; their participation in common of spiritual blessings, and of the privileges of the gospel. And this communion is immediately and especially by the operation and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. He sanctifies the heart, inspires us with love and every holy affection, and unites the various members of the church in the bond of charity and peace. "The fruit of the Spirit, is love, joy, and peace; it is all righteousness and truth." "Our fellowship," which, as St. John says, "is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," is by "the communion of the Holy Ghost."

But these titles, though in some degree appropriate and distinctive, are not exclusively so. With very few exceptions, the same titles are given to all the Persons. The title Lord, is more appropriate to the Son; but the Father is also called Lord; and so is the Holy Ghost. The Father in our text, is called God; and the others, though less frequently, are so called. The divine Spirit is commonly distinguished by the word Holy; yet the Father is holy, and so is

the Son; and the host of heaven cease not to repeat the Trisagium, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

Such was the practice of the apostles in honouring the Persons of the Deity; they addressed them as the one God, with titles and attributes in common; and as being equal in majesty and power. How important it is to worship God in trinity; to distinguish these Persons in our religious adorations, is made evident, and placed in a strong light by our Lord himself, in the form which he has appointed in the ministration of baptism. This sacrament, is on our part a declaration of our faith and religious profession. It is a covenant of pardon and acceptance, and eternal life, with the God in whom we believe and trust. Baptism is the commencement of our religious state; it is our visible admission into the kingdom of God, sealed by the names of the King whom we engage to serve; a King who will never give his glory to another; a God who will not lead us into idolatry, nor pollute his sacred name by solemnly uniting it with the name of a creature. No act of devotion can be more solemn than baptism; for in it we offer and devote not only our words, our prayers, our heart and affections, but our whole self, our soul and body, to "the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

There are those who think that the Son is a creature, and that the Holy Ghost is not a Person distinct from the Father. It is not our part to judge others; nor is it my present purpose to dispute with any; but we must take heed to ourselves; we must believe what God has taught us of himself; we must not deny

the Lord who has bought us, nor be unfaithful to that God whom, in baptism, we have so solemnly engaged to serve. Dare we treat as a creature, Him by whom all creatures and things in heaven and earth were made, and to whom the knee of every intelligent being is required to bow? Dare we degrade to the rank of a subordinate being, Him, who is the one Lord, and only Saviour? Him, to whom every attribute of divinity is by inspiration so often ascribed? Or dare we deny personality to Him, into whose name, as distinguished from the Father and the Son, we are baptized; and to whom, in the scriptures, is attributed every circumstance of complete personality? Even admitting what is so irreconcilable to the language of God's word, that the Holy Ghost is, as some contend, but another name or designation of God the Father; yet he is certainly revealed to us as being in some respect distinct from the Father; and no intimation is given that he is not a Person; of course, in viewing and honouring him as distinct from the Father, we cannot err; for we follow the scriptures; we have the word of God for our sure guide. We worship that divine Spirit, who in the bible is revealed to us, and as he is revealed to us; and we worship no other spirit. If the Holy Ghost be another name for God the Father; then certainly, by that other name, we worship God the Father. We worship that God and him only whose sacred names are graven on the shield of our faith. We make no other distinctions, than those which unquestionably are made in that standard of revealed truth, from which all our knowledge is derived. We worship no other God than Him to whom we are dedicated in

baptism; no other divine Spirit than Him who is generally by Christians acknowledged to be the true God.

II. This then, is reason sufficient for worshipping God in trinity; it is according to the doctrine of Christ and the example of his holy apostles. But we are ready to give further reasons of our religious practice; and we proceed, as was proposed, to say something of its fitness and utility. Some have objected that worshipping the Deity by these different names, is unfavourable to devotion; that it divides the attention, distracts the mind, and creates apprehension that each Person may not have his due proportion of homage. But this is a mere speculative conceit of those who are ignorant of the true faith, or misrepresent it. No one, we may venture to say, who truly believes in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, ever experienced or felt any thing of such distraction or fear. We have every reason to believe, that no Christians worship God with more consistency, or devotion, or comfort, than they who “honour the Son as they honour the Father.”

To obviate this, and every like objection, let it be carefully considered, that we worship the three Persons in unity, as one and the same God. In our belief, each Person is possessed of every divine attribute in infinite perfection. Of course, they must in the nature of things, be perfectly and inseparably one. And we also worship the unity as including the Trinity. When, therefore, by any attribute of divinity, we address our homage to the one Supreme Being, it is still addressed to the Christian’s God, to

whom we are devoted in baptism. Suppose we pray to GOD; which of the three Persons can, by this compellation, be excluded? To which of them is not, in the holy scriptures, ascribed this attribute of divinity? Or if we pray to THE LORD, is not the Father Lord? Is not the Son Lord? Is not the Holy Ghost Lord? Or suppose we address the ETERNAL Being, do we exclude from this title that word which was in the beginning with God, and which was God; “whose goings forth have been of old, even from everlasting,” and “of whose kingdom there shall be no end?” Or do we by this title, exclude the Holy Ghost, whom the scriptures denominate the Eternal Spirit? Was there, or will there be ever a time, when this Spirit of God did not, or will not exist? Do we ever address our homage to the ALMIGHTY, without adoring Him, to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth? Him, by whom and for whom all things were first made and still consist? Or without adoring the Spirit whose unrivalled prerogative is that most astonishing work of Omnipotence, the creating anew, and ruling of the hearts and lives of sinful, rebellious men? When we worship “the only wise God,” is it to the exclusion of that eternal Logos, the Word or Wisdom of God, by whom the foundations of the world were laid, and the heavens the work of his hands? Or is it to the exclusion of Him who is emphatically “the Spirit of Wisdom?”

Jehovah declares that there is no Saviour besides him. And when, like Mary, we rejoice in God our Saviour; and when we address to him our thankful adorations, we must certainly adore “the Saviour who is Christ the Lord,” and is so proclaimed to all

people, by an angel from heaven; that Saviour and that Jehovah, who says by the prophet Isaiah, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." We also adore that Eternal Spirit, by whose power working within us to will and to do, we are able to work out our own salvation. When we worship the Creator, we must adore the Son, by whom all things were created, and without whom was nothing made. We must adore "the Spirit of God," who, in the first creation, "moved upon the waters," and gave the world its form. Evidently when in a right faith we adore the Godhead in unity, the three Persons of the Deity must be all included.

And so on the other hand, it should be well understood and carefully remembered, that we worship the Trinity, or the several Persons of the Deity, as existing in unity, as one God. When we pray to any one, the other two are included, and are equally honoured. Were we to worship one exclusively; if, for instance, we were to address our homage to the first Person, with the intention and desire not to honour the Son as we honour the Father, this would be anti-christian; it would be "denying the Father and the Son," in that relation and unity which are essential to the Christian faith.

That honouring one of these Persons, is honouring the three, and worshipping the one entire Deity, is evident, we have seen, in the practice of the apostles, who addressed their homage sometimes to one, and sometimes to another, in such manner as to make it evident, that in each instance they worshipped still the same God. St. Ambrose says, "Whoever names

one Person of the Trinity, means the whole." In prayer certainly, with them who believe in the whole, this is true; whether we address the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Ghost, we pray to one and the same God; and we should always remember it when we pray. We ought not, in my judgment, even to lay such emphasis upon the distinguishing appellations, as may have the appearance of our worshipping more than one being. If, for instance, in the Litany we say, "Son of God, we beseech THEE to hear us," it implies that we have not before besought him; also that he may grant what the others will not; and that in praying to the Son, we do not pray to the others. The Persons of the Deity are inseparably united. Their attributes are in common. In our text, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," is the grace of God. "The love of God," is the love of Christ. "The communion of the Holy Ghost," is the same fellowship which we have with the Father and the Son. The Divine Being, in his nature, attributes and existence, is unlike his creatures; and no other three are, or can be one in that full and perfect sense, in which the Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost, are one. To pretend to subject this sacred mystery to the strict sense of words, and rules of grammar accommodated to other things, is improper and unwise.

Let it then be repeated and never be forgotten, that we worship the Trinity in unity. When we address the Father, can we exclude the Son who is one with the Father; or the Holy Ghost who is the Spirit of the Father? The Holy Ghost is also "the Spirit of Christ;" if then, we truly worship Christ,

his Spirit must be honoured. And if every knee in heaven and on earth should bow to Jesus Christ, which every knee ought to do, it would be “to the glory of God the Father.” And if we honour the Holy Ghost, we of course honour the Persons from whom he proceeds; for it is in that union only, as “proceeding from the Father and the Son,” that we acknowledge and adore him. It is a fundamental article of our belief, that there is but one God; but one Lord; but one Eternal Spirit; and we reject all distinction of Persons inconsistent with this perfect unity. There is no possible cause for any distraction of thought, no foundation for any fears of not worshipping each person in due proportion. We need but to worship in a true faith, and with a right spirit. As “he who has seen the Son has seen the Father;” so he who truly honours the one, will honour the other.

This subject may be illustrated in our use of the Litany. In the first four petitions, or rather the invocation for mercy four times repeated, we address distinctly each Person of the Deity, and then the three as perfectly one. When we address the first as “God the Father of heaven,” we implore the mercy of the Deity in regard to those exhibitions of the divine goodness, which, according to the language of the scriptures, are more peculiar to the Father. We raise the eye of our faith, and the adoration of our hearts, to the eternal source of all good. We invoke that love which sent a Saviour into this sinful world; which graciously accepts an atonement for our offences; which has raised up

Jesus from the dead, and exalted the Redeemer, in his character of Mediator, to the right hand of the majesty on high.

In the second address to "God the Son, Redeemer of the world," we implore the same mercy, and from the same God, with a grateful and pious regard more particularly to the divine agency in the work of redemption, and to those benefits and those mercies which we are taught to believe more particularly appertain to the second Person of the Deity. We here address God as the Lord or Jehovah; as the angel of the covenant, who appeared to the patriarchs; who delivered his people from Egypt, and fed them in the wilderness; as that Jehovah, who, in fulness of time, came to his temple, as Malachi predicted; as the Son who left the bosom of the Father, and took our humble nature; who, as Christ died and rose from the dead to save mankind, and is still our advocate with the Father.

In a subsequent part of the Litany, when praying to be delivered from the enemies of our soul, and from the evils of life, many of the mercies which distinguish the Messiah are mentioned, and with what fitness mentioned, many devout worshippers, I doubt not, have felt. When, "by the mystery of his holy incarnation, nativity and circumcision, by his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion," and other of those sufferings and triumphs of the Redeemer, which are the foundation of our hopes, we beseech this good Lord to deliver us, do not our hearts burn within us? What arguments in prayer can inspire more confidence, or be more prevailing,

than the love, and sacrifice, and merits of our Saviour? Having such a High Priest, we can "draw nigh in full assurance of faith."

Some object that invoking Christ by the sufferings of his cross, is to worship him as man, which they say is idolatrous. But the true doctrine is, that the two natures of Christ are united in one Person. Of course, worship addressed to Jesus, though this is the name most indicative of his human nature, is still addressed to the one Lord, one Saviour, one Christ. Thus prayed the holy martyr Stephen, as his soul was departing, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." It is indeed the will, and the revealed purpose of God, "that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow." And it is remarkable, and much to the present subject, that the church in heaven ascribe to an incarnate Saviour the same divine honours, as does the church on earth. St. John, as we learn in the Revelations, heard this ever "new song" of the saints around the Redeemer's throne: "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." And besides these many angels round about the throne, and others whose number is ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, (did the apostle hear,) saying, with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Angels, we see, and archangels, are not ashamed to render this high adoration to a crucified Saviour; they do it with joy unspeakable, and with a loud voice, that the universe may hear. Some have said that Christ is to be worshipped as Mediator only,

and not as God; a conceit, as we here see, totally erroneous; for he receives the homage of angels, to whom he is not a mediator. The truth evidently is, that the Son, while he is united with human nature, and reigns as Messiah, receives the same worship and glory that "he had with his Father before the world was," and before he became a mediator. Hence, with the utmost fitness, it was the injunction of the Almighty, "when he bringeth the first-begotten into the world, let all the angels of God worship him." Let him not be less honoured in consequence of his humiliation; angels were to ascribe to him the same glory which he had, before he took our nature; greater they cannot render him, for that was divine.

We also address our prayers to "God the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son," as the divine power which operates within us, and creates us again to good works. And we add a fourth petition to the "holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God," showing and declaring our full belief in the unity of the Godhead.

To these four sentences of the Litany, it has been objected that the language is not scriptural; that we have in the bible no such expressions as "God the Son, Redeemer of the world," and "God the Holy Ghost." But what is there here at variance with the scriptures? Is not "the Son" frequently called God, and the Redeemer of the world? And if the Holy Ghost be not God, what is he? Besides, it is very absurd to suppose that we are to use no expressions in prayer which are not found in the bible. There are no Christians on earth who, in

their public worship, adhere more closely to the language of inspiration, or have more of it incorporated into their religious services, than we of the Episcopal Church.

In what language the apostles prayed, we have very little information. So far as that little extends we follow their example. They very often prayed to God in unity; so do we. In one point perhaps, we depart a little from their practice. From the scriptures and the early history of the church, it appears that the first Christians addressed their prayers more frequently to the Son than we do at the present day. They were indeed from this their practice, first distinguished as "they who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Christ declared that he came not to honour himself, but his Father; which he did. But he also declared that the Spirit who should come after, would glorify him the Son. This also was done. The Holy Ghost came not to honour himself, but the Messiah. In all the "ministration of the Spirit," as recorded in the Acts, and other writings of the apostles, the Son is honoured even as the Father.

And this we deem the course of wisdom and truth. The Father we view as the fountain of all being; the infinite, self-existent God, "of whom are we and all things," and to whom all ascriptions of glory and praise should ultimately ascend. The Son we view as the agent of the Deity; "by whom are we and all things;" through whom all blessings are obtained, and with whom, as the Messiah, is our more immediate intercourse with the Deity. The Holy Ghost we view as the Lord of life, in whom we live, and

he in us; by whom we are sanctified and daily renewed, and strengthened to every good work. By the Holy Ghost the Father and the Son abide with us.

Having so long detained you with this subject, I can but briefly remark, in the way of improvement,

First: That though it is very proper and edifying to address our adorations to either, or to all of the divine Persons distinctly, and it should sometimes be done; yet as we have a much clearer knowledge of the general attributes of the Deity, than of these personal distinctions, we may, as in fact we do, with the utmost propriety, still oftener worship God in unity. I remark,

Secondly: That as in honouring one Person, we honour the three; so in loving one, we love them all. If you truly believe in the God to whom you are dedicated in baptism, you need not fear that your affection for any one Person, will be greater or less than a just proportion. You may consider too little, or prize too lightly some particular mercies; while, for instance, you have a just sense of the Saviour's merits, and duly appreciate his love in giving his life for your sins, you may too much forget "that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost," and that you can do nothing without his aid; you may not sufficiently honour God as working in you, both to will and to do. Let it not then be forgotten that "our fellowship is with the Father and the Son;" and that this fellowship is eminently "the communion of the Holy Ghost." Let this "be with you all," and you cannot greatly err. The love of God springing from a right faith, cannot be divided. In

viewing a beautiful landscape, some may be most pleased with the trees and verdure; others with the lakes or streams of water; and others still with the hills and distant mountains; but they all admire the same scenery, and equally adore the Being who formed it. So whether you love God chiefly because he first loved you, and gave his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for your sins; or if you love God rather because he took your nature, and wrought the mighty work of your redemption; or suppose your grateful affection should be still more engaged by the most comforting assurance that he dwells within you; inspires you with holy desires; defends you in every danger, and aids you in the performance of every duty, you still love the same God; and if you contemplate these mercies in their just proportion, and let them have their due influence upon your heart and life, most certainly “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, are with you.”

Finally: The grand result; the main inference from our subject is, That the distinction of Persons, in our addresses to God, should, and it must be strange if it does not, awaken in our souls a deeper sense of God’s goodness, and a more comforting view of his mercies. Can you pray especially to the Father, without being much affected with “the love of God,” which must, in the mind of the true believer, be associated with this endearing title, “Our Father who is in heaven?” When your adorations are directed to the Son of God, does not “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” who is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” cause your heart to burn, and melt

your soul into penitence and love? Can you devoutly pray to the divine Spirit, who is sent by the Father and the Son to be your comforter and dwell within you, rendering your body “the temple of God,” and yet feel no “consolation in Christ; no comfort of love; no fellowship of the Spirit; no bowels of mercies?” This cannot be; the scriptures teach, and experience confirms, that it is profitable and edifying to worship the God, of whom, and through whom, and by whom we are made, and redeemed, and sanctified.

And let us daily and earnestly pray, that “he who has given us grace, by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the divine Majesty to worship the unity, will keep us steadfast in this faith.” “Beware, lest any man spoil you,” lest your faith be perverted “through philosophy and a vain deceit; after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ; for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;” and if you worship him in his true character, you worship God. Let men say, if they will persist in saying, that you worship three gods, or four, or twenty. Such uncharitable misrepresentations should excite your pity, rather than your resentment. For yourself it is enough to know that you worship but one God, and him only whose sacred names are graven upon your Christian armour. May “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with us all;” to this, with the inspired apostle, we say, “Amen.”

SERMON XXI.



ON THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER.

Job. xxi. 15.

What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

THE moral, like the natural world, continues from age to age the same. The sentiments and hopes and pious trust of religious men, and the scoffs and the reasonings of infidelity, were the same in the days of Job, that they are at the present time. God was then merciful, and showered his blessings upon the earth, as he still does; and the same ingratitude and departure from his laws, operated then which now prevail. In this chapter, Job speaks of the wicked; they live to old age; “they are mighty in power;” their dwellings remain in peace; their herds increase; “their children dance,” and “thus spend their days in wealth,” and mirth, and vanity, even to the moment when they go down to the grave, without repentance, or any serious regard for their future state.

And what inference did men then make from this forbearance and long-suffering of God? The same

which they make still; they despised his laws, and denied his providence. “Therefore, they say unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have if we pray unto him?” “Are we not as healthy and strong, as prosperous and happy in the world, as they who fear God, and call upon his name, and practise religion?”

From these words, as indeed from all ancient history, we learn that prayer is not a new thing. The pious of all ages, and wise and good men generally, have acknowledged the fitness of prayer, and have been sensible that it is both our duty and our privilege, to adore God, and ask of him the things which we need, and which he alone can give. Prayer is of all exercises the most purely religious; it is the most direct and intimate communion of the soul with her God and Saviour. And we may then expect that every corrupt propensity of our nature, and every art of our spiritual foe, will be opposed to this holy exercise. Great and inestimable as is this privilege, it is natural to our fallen state, that excuses innumerable, and all manner of objections, should be employed to justify, or at least to quiet conscience under the neglect of prayer. Some indeed, who cannot quiet conscience, still live in the neglect of it. They feel that they ought to be more constant in their attendance on public worship; that they ought at their meals, to bless the God whose bounty feeds them; that they ought to pray with their families, and to be often on their knees in private devotion; and yet, the performance is irksome; they had rather attend to their worldly business, or to their pleasures;

or even to do nothing, is to them more pleasing than to pray.

But men had much rather quiet conscience than endure its reproofs. He that lives without prayer, generally endeavours to satisfy himself that it is unnecessary and useless. There is a vain philosophy existing in every age, which affects to be wiser than the rest of the world, and to condemn the experience of ages and the maxims of common sense. Thousands conceive that their own reasoning is superior to every proof which can be brought from the general views and practice of mankind; from all the records of history; from the experience of good men, and from the word of God. And in preaching the gospel, it is sometimes expedient to meet the boasters "of science falsely so called," upon their own ground, and to expose the weakness of their arguments.

It is intended in the present discourse, the Lord permitting, first and chiefly, to obviate some of the principal objections which are made to the worship of God; and secondly, to answer more directly this question of infidelity, "What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"

I. Among the objections and arguments urged against the profitableness of prayer, is one grounded on the immutability of God's nature. The divine Being all allow, is unchangeable in his nature and providence; and from this some infer, that prayer is unreasonable and improper; because, it supposes that God will change in consequence of our petitions. But they who make this objection, err through ignorance. They ought to know and to consider, that

the change effected by prayer, is not in Him who hears and grants, but in men who offer the petitions. In setting forth our wants, we make God no wiser; he knows our ignorance in asking. We render him no more gracious in his nature; he is infinite in goodness and in every perfection. Prayer does not indeed, nor can any thing render God more benevolent, or more disposed to benefit his creatures, and make them happy; but it makes us more fit and better prepared to receive his favours. It is a part of the divine system in the government of the universe, or of this world certainly, that they who honour God shall by him be blessed and honoured. His grace is exhibited to us on this condition; "Ask and ye shall receive." His immutable word is pledged to hear our prayers, and to grant our requests. It is because he is faithful; it is because he is unchangeable, that they who seek of him shall find. God is the giver of all temporal blessings; but many of them we never receive, nor can receive, except we, on our part, use those means for attaining them which God has appointed. You must eat, or you will perish with hunger; nor can your bread be obtained without the use of means. This shows not that God is changeable; but that he is wise, and just, and good. When a father withholds favours from his children, while they are refractory and disobedient, and is kind to the same children if they repent and ask his pardon, he is wise and consistent; his purpose and character remain immutable; the child it is who changes. God undoubtedly will do what is fitting to every man and for every man, whether he pray or not; but every man should well consider that some

things may, in God's sight, be fitting for those who pray, and yet be unfit for those who neglect the duty: in like manner, and for the like reason, that, as you daily see, he gives health and peace and prosperity to the temperate, and prudent, and industrious; while, by the same unchangeable providence, those great blessings are generally withholden from the luxurious, profligate, and idle.

2. There is a second and similar objection to prayer, which is often made and much more relied upon. This is founded on the divine benevolence. Many say with their lips, and still more in their hearts, God is infinitely good and merciful; he perfectly knows whatever we need, and all that is fitting for us to receive; and is therefore in his nature, disposed to do us good, as well without as with our asking. If they who reason thus, would try the strength and soundness of their argument upon temporal things, they would need no other answer. Will not the same reasoning prove, (if it prove any thing,) that all effort and exertion in this world to regain or preserve our health, to feed and clothe our bodies, to avoid evil, or to obtain any good thing, is unnecessary and useless? Admit the justness of this reasoning, and the most careless and indolent people have a ready and good excuse. The Lord knows what we need; he is infinitely benevolent, and ever disposed to do us good; of his own bountiful mercy, he will give us health, and food, and life, and all the comforts which make life happy, as well and as abundantly, without our labour and diligence and care. Evidently this reasoning is as good

when thus applied to temporal blessings, as to spiritual. If it be consistent with the divine benevolence to withhold the good things of this world from those who neglect the proper means for obtaining them, he may also, without any impeachment of his goodness, withhold spiritual benefits from those who will not use the appointed means of obtaining them. The same infinite God, who in his providential system gives some blessings as the fruit of our manual labour, may equally consistent with his enerring wisdom and unchanging purpose, give good things to those who pray unto him. And if no one in practice would be so absurd as to expect bread to be prepared for his table without labour bestowed, how can any one think it unreasonable, humbly to hope that God will mercifully hear our petitions for what we need? Such weak reasoning will be admitted by those who have none better, for neglecting religion; but apply it to those temporal things in which they feel a real interest, and they will reject it with contempt. The Lord knows, and he has clearly told us, that it is as necessary to pray for grace as to labour for bread. "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, much more will your heavenly Father give his Spirit to those who ask him." His benevolence is a reason, not why we should neglect prayer, but why we should perform it. Remember too, that God has other attributes besides benevolence, he is wise; he is just; he is faithful, and will keep his covenant and promise for evermore. In the view of divine wisdom, it is as fitting that heavenly treasures should be gained by religion, as

earthly goods by labour. The Lord's goodness does not require him to give grace to prayerless lips, any more than to fill idle hands with bread.

3. Others have argued against prayer from God's decrees. Every thing they say, is unalterably determined and foreordained by his sovereign purpose and unchanging will; and therefore, it cannot be in our power, by what we will or do, to effect, or to be instrumental in effecting, any alteration in future events.

And this argument we might briefly answer, as we did the two preceding. For you can easily see that this reasoning also applies as justly, and as forcibly to temporal, as to spiritual things. If it prove prayer to be unavailing and useless, it proves also, that every pursuit of worldly things will be of no avail. Why do you take medicine when sick? Why are you at any pains to avoid evil? Why do you study, and labour, and strive for good things to come? If nothing can be altered, what is the use of all these cares and efforts? Every thing will surely take place precisely as the Lord has ordained.

This reasoning then, you see, if it prove any thing, proves too much; it shows that all exertions for any purpose are without use. "Every careless, lazy person, might use the same argument of eternal decrees, whenever called upon to mind his business, or to take care of his health, or to look after the salvation of his soul." But let a man be truly desirous to obtain any good, and he will be sure to resort to the use of means. Does a man's confidence in God's decrees ever embolden him to swallow poison, or to give up the business by which he lives? Are those

who are very desirous to be rich, ever induced to give up the pursuit of wealth, from the belief that their own labours and cares will avail them nothing? No, the children of this world are wiser in their generation, than in their favourite pursuits, to reason and to act in direct opposition to the wisdom of experience and common sense. It is only when excusing our duty to God, when neglecting the concerns of our souls, that such sophistries can content us. In the service of God, the coldest affections, the weakest arguments, the slightest apologies, and the most trifling objections, are deemed sufficient.

But where do we learn that every event is absolutely predetermined by the Almighty, that he cannot, or that he will not so order the dispensations of his providence as to answer prayer? We do not learn this in his works; for there we are encouraged to use all proper means; and there we see ten thousand events are daily and continually effected or brought about by the volitions and the agency of men. We learn it not from the experience of men. For the general experience of the faithful and pious confirms the truth, that "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man, availeth much." Nor do we learn it from the word of God; it is positive and express to the contrary. "Ask and ye shall receive." "Ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss." What does the Lord declare by his prophet Jeremiah? He says, "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, or concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent

of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Even after evil is pronounced, he will turn it away in answer to prayer. And of this we have an eminent example in the case of the Ninevites. The sentence of destruction, positive and seemingly inevitable, was denounced from the lips of the prophet Jonah; "Yet forty days, and Ninevah shall be destroyed." But this people "against whom the Lord had pronounced, did turn from their wickedness," and in their case did God "repent of the evil which he thought to do unto them." Whatever may be our speculative opinion of fate or of predestination, evidently the works of nature, the word of God, the practice of ages, and our own experience, encourage us to trust in the efficacy of prayer. It is remarkable, that the ancient pagans supposed fate to be so strong, as to bind even their gods; and yet, such confidence had they in the power and efficacy of prayer, as to believe that fate itself would yield to the supplications of men. Will they not rise up in judgment and condemn the refinements of those metaphysicians, who oppose their vain reason to common sense, and the word of God? We may add also, that God predestinates the means, no less than the end. If he has ordained that men shall receive blessings, temporal or spiritual, he has also ordained the means by which they shall be obtained; and for ought we know, he has predestinated that certain good things shall be bestowed only in consequence of our prayers; it is perhaps his decree, that we shall not receive except we ask; and that if we neglect to knock, the door of his heavenly kingdom shall not be opened unto us. View as you will the intricate ques-

tion of God's decrees, it gives you no more reason for neglecting prayer, than for neglecting every thing.

4. But while men had rather reason than obey, there will be no end of objections. Some have argued against prayer, from the laws of nature. All events, they say, proceed from natural causes, which prayer cannot change or affect. But to give any force to this argument, it must first be proved that God does not, by his providence, govern the world; we must first suppose that God is an inactive being; which is much the same as supposing what "the fool in his heart has said, that there is no God." Who can prove, or who can give any good reason for believing, that the Almighty does not govern the world which he has made, and order all things according to the counsel of his own will? We talk much of the laws of nature, but who will pretend to define them, or to trace its operations to their first principles and original cause? Who will presume to decide how far the immediate agency of the Deity may be, or may not be in every event, and every cause? In a thousand ways within our limited conceptions, may the Almighty govern the world, and give any turn or change to its affairs, without doing violence to any laws of nature, of which we have knowledge. How innumerable and immense were the effects resulting from so small a thing as the dream of Joseph the son of Jacob? And cannot he who formed the mind, put thoughts into it? It is most reasonable to believe, that the whole system of nature is under the control of its author. Nature is his handmaid; or rather the accustomed operation of

his hand, which he can vary as wisdom directs and the good of his creatures may require.

But the course of nature and the things of this world, have but little connexion with the main object of prayer. What we are chiefly to ask of God, is spiritual blessings; and from what cause, or what source can we expect them, but from the immediate operation of the Lord's merciful goodness? Can we, without extreme folly, leave our spiritual concerns, even the salvation of our souls, to the course of nature? What principle can you discover among the works of creation, which will ensure the pardon of your sins, sanctify your heart, and bestow upon you the blessings of immortality? Will the power of attraction cleanse your heart from moral defilement, and withdraw your affections from sinful vanities? Will the laws of gravitation raise us from the dead and give us spiritual bodies? Or will any principles in the whole frame of nature, give us any well grounded hope of pardon, peace, and life, through Jesus Christ? No; these are gifts, not of nature, but of grace; they "come not with observation;" they result from no settled course of causes and effect; they flow from a wise, intelligent, divine Being, who requires that they who would receive, must ask for them by diligent prayer.

II. These are among the chief objections opposed to the duty and usefulness of prayer. And enough, I trust, has been said, to convince you that they are totally groundless; and also to prepare your minds for a more direct and positive reply to this question of infidelity, "What profit should we have, if we

pray unto him?" The best answer we can give you is, make the experiment; frequently offer your prayers to God, with fervency and perseverance; and let experience decide; let the result tell you whether it be profitable.

1. But we may answer particularly, that if you pray unto him, you will perform a rational duty, a just homage, a reasonable service. To worship God is the dictate of common sense, and is felt and acknowledged to be a duty by those who are not hardened by sin, nor blinded by pride. Nothing is more obvious than our dependance upon God, and what can be more just than to acknowledge it? Nothing can be more fitting than to ascribe the praise of all that is good to its adorable author. And what can be more reasonable and wise, than for creatures, whose wants are so many and so great, to look for help to him, who alone is able and willing to relieve them?

2. If you pray unto him, you will quiet the reproofs of conscience, which, in spite of all your objections and philosophy, will accuse and disturb those who neglect to worship God. There are few people, at the close of life, and especially during their last sickness, who do not lament that they have not employed more of their time in calling upon God in prayer. They are then sensible that nothing would have been so profitable as praying unto him.

3. If you pray unto him, you will obey his express command. And is not this of the most serious and mighty consideration? To displease a being so good and so infinite in every adorable attribute, is what of all things we ought most to fear. Fear him, says

our Saviour, and him only, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. But if we believe his word, certain it is, that we shall offend him; shall incur his awful displeasure, by withholding that homage and adoration, which is so justly due from his creatures. For this chiefly, has he distinguished us by the gift of reason, from all the creatures of this terrestrial world, that man should be the priest of nature, the tongue of this lower world; that in this, as in other parts of the created universe, the praise of God may be heard. This homage is all the return that we can make for all the unnumbered, and some of them unspeakable mercies which we enjoy or hope for. By this just and grateful homage, we obey, we please, and we commune with God. They who thus honour him, he has promised that he will honour and bless.

4. Again. If you pray unto him, you not only obey God in so doing, but you take the readiest and most effectual course to perform every other duty which you owe to God, or to your neighbour, or to yourself. Prayer brings us near to God; and more than any thing else that we can do, it purifies the heart, and makes us what we should be. It has a natural tendency to make us good, and to produce in us those holy affections which we ask for. Of all the means of grace and sanctification, prayer is the most effectual; it is most powerful to eradicate or subdue every evil and corrupt affection, and to produce all virtue and holiness of living. Accordingly, when St. Paul exhorts us to “put on the whole armour of God,” he adds, “praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit;” because all other

performances, and every thing else that we can do will, without this, be unavailing. It is only in God's strength that we can go on to perfection, and that strength he has promised to those only who ask.

5. To these and other advantages, and profit of prayer, we may add, that if you pray unto him, you will obtain the things you ask for. You know well how full the scriptures are of promises to this effect; and how many wonderful instances they record of prayer, which have been heard and granted. We have promise of temporal blessings, of good things in this world, in answer to prayer. Some we know, have said with their lips, and more we may fear are daily saying in their hearts, "God gives me the good things of this world without my asking. My labours are blessed though I never ask God to bless them. I devise plans, trusting in my own wisdom, and those plans succeed. Without praying for God's protection, I lay me down to rest, and I sleep in quiet, and I rise refreshed. My table is bountifully spread, though I never bless God at my meals. I have many more comforts than my poor neighbours, though they are pious, and pray without ceasing." We know well, that God does thus for a season, prosper the wicked, and in some cases, they seem, as the psalmist says, to "come into no misfortune like other men." But though they possess these good things, is it sure that they have God's blessing with them? Will they prove in the end to be real blessings? The Lord sometimes sends riches and prosperity in his wrath. Hardened sinners he lets alone; he permits them to go on and to perish in their own way. But if you serve God, if you pray to him, and trust in him,

what he gives will be in love, and be blessed to your real good. If you pray to him, not only riches, but poverty, shall be a blessing; afflictions shall be sanctified; every thing shall work for your good. But chiefly by prayer, you will obtain that which is better than riches, or honours, or life itself, even the loving kindness of the Lord. What would it profit to gain the whole world and lose our own souls? What value can there be in a few years of vanity, if we must be in consequence, more wretched for ever? The treasures of this world are less than worthless, if we must exchange for them the riches of grace and the hopes of heaven. If you faithfully serve God, he will give you that only which is truly good; which shall best prepare you for immortal blessedness. If you pray to God he will in this world be your hope, and in heaven he will be your portion.

You see then, something of the profit which you will have, if you pray unto him; you will perform a very important duty; you will satisfy your conscience, and have peace within; you will obey the express command of your God and Saviour; you will obtain grace and strength to perform every other duty; and you will obtain the richest blessing that man can hope for, and that God will give.

Let us then make that improvement which is obvious; let us be more earnest and diligent in this holy, this profitable exercise. We cannot possibly be truly religious and accepted and blessed of God, without prayer. "Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and a vain deceit." A right use of our reason is noble and praise-worthy; and we ought to "pray with the understanding." But the reason, falsely so called, which is opposed to common

sense; the pride of reason which vaunteth itself above the experience of ages, and the wisdom of God, is indeed "a vain deceit." They who thus profess to be wise become fools. What nation, or language, or people, not wholly sunk in barbarism, have not acknowledged the utility, and encouraged the practice of prayer? In this, "the wise and unwise," the learned sage, and the humble peasant, have generally agreed. Prayer is a reasonable service, and indispensably necessary to the Christian character; it is a profitable exercise of the mind, and not to be neglected without offence to God, and injury to ourselves.

In answering the objections to prayer, we must have seen the striking analogy between the kingdoms of nature and of grace. The same bountiful God who gives food to our labour, gives grace to our prayer; and those arguments which men urge to show that prayer is unprofitable, prove also, if they prove any thing, that it is of no use to strive for temporal things. The very objections, therefore, made to praying, when rightly viewed, show its importance; our natural aversion to it proves that we have much need to pray, that God may change our hearts, and renew a right spirit within us. It is the deceitfulness of sin; it is an evil heart of unbelief which causes the neglect of this essential duty, this holy exercise of faith. Against this evil heart, let us oppose the most sure and effectual remedy, our humble and earnest supplications. The disciples of Jesus were wise when they said, "Lord increase our faith." May the Lord God of our salvation, both "teach us to pray," and hear our prayers, for his mercies' sake in Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXII.



ON THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Matt. vi. 9. 13.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

AMONG all the means of spiritual benediction, and of obtaining the favour of God, which, in his abundant mercy, he has bestowed upon mankind, prayer is unquestionably the most essential and efficacious. And of all forms, or expressions of devout feeling in prayer, this which our blessed Lord prescribed, has an unrivalled pre-eminence. Of course, there is no other prayer which so merits our attention, and none, we trust, which by Protestants is so frequently used, as this.

But to utter words with our lips is but a part, and not the most essential part of prayer. We are to pray with the spirit, and with the understanding.

Not only must our heart, or the affections of our mind, be fervently engaged, but our rational faculties are to be employed. It is required that we use words suitable for man to offer before God, and that we understand their true sense; and this the Lord's Prayer should especially be well understood by every Christian.

Our Lord's direction here is, "after this manner pray ye;" by which, as some understand it, he means that this is to be the model of our prayers; but that he does not command his disciples to use these very words. If we admit this explanation, still, except we can mend this form or make it better, it will be proper sometimes to use it entire as it is. This direction was given in the first year of his ministry, in the sermon on the mount. St. Luke has recorded in the eleventh chapter of his gospel, that about two years after, "as Jesus was praying in a certain place, when he had ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples; and he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name;" giving them again this same form, which by way of distinction, we call the Lord's Prayer. And on this second occasion, he does not direct them to pray after this manner, but he commands them to use these words; "When ye pray, say, our Father which art in heaven." In the sermon on the mount this prayer seems to have been given them for private use; "When thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly;" and they used it

probably, in their closets only. Sometime after, when they desired him to give them a form for social worship, as John had done to his disciples, our Lord gave them the same form which he had before prescribed for their private use, as being equally suitable for social worship.

Some think it an objection to using this prayer, that it is not expressly offered in the name of Jesus Christ. But we should consider that praying in the name of Jesus, consists not so much in mentioning his name, as in the object of the understanding, and purpose of the heart. When we pray in his very words, and use them because they are his words, and in obedience to his direction, trusting only in his merits, in the highest sense we offer all in the name of Christ. We honour him as our Prophet, who has taught us to pray. We honour him as our Priest, looking unto God through him; and we honour him as our King, using this prayer in obedience to his command. The first words, "Our Father," imply that we ask in Christ's name; because it is only through him, the only Son of God, and as his brethren, that we can, and that we presume to "cry Abba;" to address God as our Father. It is evident that we ought sometimes to use these very words, and always to keep them in view, as a guide and pattern to our devotions.

The object of this discourse, is a practical exposition of the Lord's Prayer. As in using these words, we ought especially to "pray with the understanding;" and, as it contains much meaning in few words, it is a matter of very essential concern, that we give frequent and very careful attention to

their true sense. In handling the subject, it is proposed first, to give a short explanation of each part or petition; and then still more briefly, to remind you of what ought to be the effect on our heart and life.

I. The Lord's Prayer may fitly be divided into eight parts; for besides the introduction and conclusion, there are six petitions, or expressions of devout feeling and desire.

1. The introductory address is, "Our Father who art in heaven." By this endearing title, which, through his only Son we are permitted to use, we are strongly reminded of God's love and care for his people, and of the reverence and duty which we owe him. He is indeed our Father by nature; he is the author of our being; he made us in his own image. By his providential care, he is also entitled to the same appellation. By grace too, he is our Father, who creates us again unto good works; but chiefly, and in a more proper sense, by adoption, in which we are made children of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. We are to say "our Father," to remind us that God has the same love and care for others, whom, therefore, we must view and treat as brethren. We address him as "our Father who art in heaven," acknowledging his infinite majesty and universal power; whilst we are here on earth, his humble, weak, and dependent creatures. As our Father is in heaven, and our Saviour is exalted to the same celestial regions where he has prepared mansions for us, there also should our hearts and our conversation be.

2. The first petition, or expression of adoration is, "Hallowed be thy name;" acknowledging that God in his nature is holy, and should be sanctified by the worship and obedience of his creatures. We thus pray that God would "send his grace unto us and to all people; that we may worship, serve, and obey him as we ought to do;" that the third commandment may be observed; that God's name may never be polluted or profaned; that because he is holy, we may be holy, and "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and that through his grace our light may shine before men to his honour and praise.

3. We next pray, "Thy kingdom come." And this we may understand of his kingdom of grace here in this world, and also of his kingdom of glory, which shall be hereafter. In the first sense, we should pray for the increase of God's grace in our hearts; that his kingdom may come with power, and be established within us; that our will and affections may be more and still more controlled by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, till every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and every thought be subjected to the obedience of Christ. We pray also for the increase of true religion and the church of Christ, amongst us, and throughout the world; that the gospel of the kingdom may be extended to foreign parts; that the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and his saving health, may extensively be diffused through the nations of the earth, till all the ends of the world shall see the salvation of our God; that where Christianity is truly believed, it may be faithfully practised; where it is not known, that God will be pleased to send it, till at the name of Jesus

every knee shall bow ; till every tongue shall confess the doctrines of his cross, and all the kingdoms of the earth become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ.

In the second sense of this petition, we pray that the church, and we as members of it, may, in due time, be glorified in heaven, and shine forth as the sun in our heavenly Father's kingdom ; that we, with all the redeemed, may reign with our Lord for ever.

4. Next follows, in this prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ;" in which words, we acknowledge that God's will is wise, and just, and good, and ought, by all intelligent creatures, to be done. We relinquish any improper reliance upon our own wisdom ; and desire in heart and life, to submit to God's righteousness, saying and feeling with our blessed Saviour, "Not as I will, O God, but as thou wilt." And this we desire, may be done by all men "on earth," as it is done by the saints and angels who dwell in the mansions of bliss ; that truth and righteousness may fill the earth ; that all who breathe this vital air, and enjoy the blessings of God, may do his will.

5. Having thus expressed our devout desire that God may be honoured and obeyed, we are directed next to ask, that our wants may be relieved ; and first, our temporal wants ; "Give us this day our daily bread." Such modesty in asking becomes our humble state. As God is in heaven and we upon earth, our words should be few, and our desires expressed in general, comprehensive terms. But a little, and he only knows how little, is necessary for

our bodily sustenance. Without our daily bread we cannot live; having food and raiment, we ought to be content. In this petition, we acknowledge that God is the giver of temporal blessings, and that we are to pursue them with moderation; to use them with temperance, and to be satisfied with that which God shall please to give. As we do not know that abundance would be for our real good, we ought not to pray for wealth or luxuries. Should he give us riches, as he did to Solomon, and does to many others, we are to receive them thankfully and use them to his honour; but our prayers should be for those things which are evidently “requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.” As we do not know that another day is to be added to our lives, it is enough that we ask that the wants of this day may be supplied. It teaches us that to-morrow is not ours; the present is the time given us; and we should live as if “this day” were to be our last. We are further taught, that we are continually dependent on God, and should daily offer to him our prayers.

Some seem to suppose, that if the Lord's Prayer be used in the evening, or in the night, to say “this day” is improper. But surely a moment's reflection must convince any, that this word is not used as distinguishing the day from the night. It signifies the present time; it is asking for what we now need; and may, with exactly the same propriety, be used in any one of the twenty-four hours.

Some believe, and there are good reasons for believing, that bread in this prayer is meant to include the bread of life eternal; the heavenly manna which nourishes the soul. And in my judgment, our hearts

should include this sense, when we offer this petition. We have the promise, that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the bread of this life "shall be added unto us."

6. The next sentence of the prayer is exceedingly interesting; "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." By debts here, is undoubtedly meant trespasses, or sins; and so in St. Luke's gospel it is expressed. We owe debts of gratitude, and praise, and obedience, to God. These we should not desire to be forgiven, but gladly pay them. The debts which men justly owe to us, we are not accustomed to forgive, and we are allowed to exact them: We must be careful then, not to use these words, debts and debtors, in their usual sense; for this would be to mock rather than to pray. The true sense is given in the old translation which we commonly use, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." This sense does our Lord confirm, in the words immediately after the text; "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." This undoubtedly is the sense; and a sense it is, which merits our awakened and most profound attention. That we have sins which need forgiveness; that the best of us daily trespass against God, who will question? "What man liveth and sinneth not? In many things we offend all; and when we do good, evil is present with us." Daily should we supplicate for mercy, not for ourselves only, but for others; "Forgive us our trespasses." Throughout the prayer we are taught that the same

blessings which we ask for ourselves, we should ask for our fellow men; and think of our neighbour's good, when we regard our own.

But they who seek for mercy, must "love mercy;" we must forgive, if we expect to be forgiven. Our Saviour, as you see, does not authorize us to ask forgiveness, but on this condition: "Blessed are the merciful, for they (and they alone,) shall obtain mercy." This petition of the Lord's Prayer, is purely Christian. The other parts of it were selected from the prayers in use among the Jews; but this part our Saviour added, and it breathes forth the pure spirit of his gospel. It teaches that forgiving temper, that spirit of love, that bond of charity, which is the fulfilling of the law, and the essence of the gospel. This spirit of forgiveness is peace within us; it promotes peace on earth, and is an evidence of our peace with God. It is a pure flame, the true fire from heaven, which consumes the offering of penitence upon the altar of the heart, and sends up the odour of a grateful incense to heaven. A virtue so purely Christian, never dwells in the heart alone. We sincerely love those whom we truly forgive. It is a flame which warms the heart with unbounded charity, and brings forth the fruits of the Spirit.

7. But it is not enough that we ask of God forgiveness of sins past; it is equally important that we are preserved from sin for the time to come. And accordingly, we are taught to say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Temptation here means a state or situation wherein we are provoked or intend to do evil. We cannot expect to be wholly free from such trials, till we leave this world

of sin. We must be willing to serve God in every duty, and to submit to afflictive dispensations. This prayer expresses a sense of our weakness. We feel that if tempted to sin, and left to ourselves, we are in danger of falling. Though, as St. James says, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" yet, if he let us alone, if his good providence be not active in our behalf, we shall "fall into sin, and run into every kind of danger." If he do not preserve us from temptation, we shall of course be led into it. This is a petition for God's preventing grace, and preserving mercy; that in compassion of our weakness and for the honour of his name, he will not permit us to be exposed to perilous trials. And there is no petition which we have need to offer with more earnestness or frequency; that, if consistent with his holy will, we may be preserved from peril; and in those trials of our faith and fortitude, to which in his wisdom, it is fitting that we should be exposed, that he will mercifully defend, and deliver us from evil; "that he will save and defend us in all dangers, both of soul and body; that he will keep us from all sin and wickedness, from our spiritual enemy, and from everlasting death." Or, as an apostle has better, and not less briefly expressed it, that he "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will, with the temptation also, make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it."

8. To render this a complete form of devotion, there is added an excellent and very appropriate doxology; "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." But as this was not added when our Lord the second time prescribed

the prayer, it is not improper that we should sometimes omit it, which we do. In this conclusion, we acknowledge that the government of the world, and the ordering of all things, justly and truly belong to God. The kingdom is his, and by his power he governs the church, and he rules the hearts of men. From Him all holy desires, good counsels, and just works, do proceed. To him, therefore, we justly ascribe the glory of whatever is excellent, or useful, or good in the frame of nature, the events of providence, and the salvation of men. When we thus pray, our "trust is, that God will do" what we ask "of his mercy and goodness, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore we say, Amen," which signifies "so be it." With this sacred word we solemnly repeat and confirm the whole as sincerely our earnest desire and humble request.

And thus do you see, that if in this form we "pray with the understanding;" if our hearts enter into the full sense of these petitions, few as they are, we shall ask for all that we most need, and the things for which we ought chiefly to pray.

II. But to repeat them with our lips, even if we understand them, is not the whole, nor the most essential part of the homage which God requires. We must "worship the Father in Spirit," as well as "in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him." To pray effectually, or with a good hope and assurance of obtaining our requests, we must pray with faith in the merits of Christ, and the mercy of God, and also with a humble and earnest desire to obtain the things we need. And, what I fear is but

little thought of, and is much neglected, we should desire, and should earnestly endeavour to be what we pray God to make us; we should be willing to do, and active in doing, what and all that is on our part necessary, to the obtaining what we ask for. If we ask for blessings of any sort, and yet live as though we did not desire them; if, while our lips express earnestness, our lives and conduct speak the language of indifference, how can our prayers be sincere; how can we reasonably hope to obtain our petitions? Our life, not less than our words; our whole conduct, must show that we desire these things, and that our hope of obtaining them, is in the merciful goodness of God. While our actions contradict our words, our prayers will be unavailing. Nothing can be more practical than the Lord's Prayer; no part of the holy scriptures is more "profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness," than our present text; and let us not fail to make the due improvement.

1. When you say "Our Father who art in heaven," remember from whom it is that "you have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father;" even from Jesus Christ his only Son, with whom, through the redemption that is in him, we are made the children of God and joint-heirs of his kingdom. Of course, you will offer the prayer in the name of Christ; as he only renders God your reconciled Father, through him only should you think of approaching that heavenly Parent; through him only can you ask for any favours. Remember too, that he is not your Father only, but our Father; and that all we are brethren; and see that you "love as

brethren.” And if God is our Father, let us not forget that children are to be respectful and obedient. To call him Father, and then go and disobey his commands, would be insulting him. As God is your Father through Christ, whatever through Christ he has ordained, should you carefully observe and do. “Be ye therefore, followers of God as dear children.”

2. You must also hallow, not with your lips only, but in your heart and life, God’s holy name. To those who receive the Saviour and “believe on his name, he gives power to become the sons of God.” To honour the Father, you must walk by faith in the Son of God, and endeavour to follow his holy example. You cannot “in spirit” pray that God’s name may be hallowed, except in your words and life you show him reverence. If you take his name in vain; if you treat sacred things with levity, or say or do that which naturally tends to render the religion of Christ, or the holy scriptures, less esteemed or respected by men, your conduct shows it to be your pleasure, that his name should be dishonoured and despised.

3. And do you sincerely pray that God’s kingdom may come? Certainly then, you must carefully avoid every thing which will prevent its establishment, and growth, and power in your own heart, and in the hearts and lives of others. If you do indeed pray for the coming of God’s kingdom, you will not only endeavour in all respects to be truly a Christian, but you will also be ready and willing, as God shall give you opportunity and power, every way to promote religion among those with whom you have social intercourse; your family, and friends and neighbours.

And to be consistent, we must, according to our means, contribute of our substance, and devote a reasonable portion of our time, to support the ministrations of religion, and to propagate the faith of Christ among all people. Without this correspondence of our practice, there can be no more sincerity in our prayers for the coming of God's kingdom, than there is of charity in those who say to the poor, be ye warmed and filled, without giving them what they need. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." In nothing is a Christian more likely to be deceived, than in mistaking the form for the power of godliness; and especially in supposing that saying prayers is praying.

4. The like may be said of the next petition. If in your heart you daily pray that God's will may be done on earth, can you, without very great inconsistency, break God's commandments, or any way neglect that which you know to be his will? In heaven all is obedience, harmony and love; and the sincerity of this prayer is to be shown, by our doing what is in our power to promote the like holiness and peace on earth.

5. So our prayers for daily bread, to be really prayers, must be accompanied with endeavours to "provide things honest in the sight of all men." Be temperately industrious, and be moderate in your desires for temporal things. "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." And as "man does not live by bread alone, but by the word of God," let it be your desire, and use all proper means, to obtain the heavenly manna, the bread of eternal life. And

6. Not only should you ask God to forgive your sins, but chiefly you must forgive those who trespass against you. This was our Saviour very particular in teaching, that what is so essential may be deeply impressed upon our minds. Before you bend your knees to offer this petition, see that you are "in charity with all men." Can you sincerely ask for mercy, except you also "love mercy?" Never forget who has said, and with reference to this very petition, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you."

7. With our lips we may pray, "Lead us not into temptation;" but not with our hearts, except we are careful to avoid temptation, and not unnecessarily to be in situations which expose us to evil. If you would pray thus in spirit and in truth, shun whatever will entice you to sin. Do not needlessly visit places, frequent company, read books, or follow any kind of pleasures, which have a tendency to corrupt your heart, weaken your faith, or draw you into evil; and you may then hope, that in all those trials to which it shall please God to call you, he will deliver you from evil.

8. Finally, if the kingdom be God's, obey him in all things; if his be the power to relieve your wants, and to save your soul, trust in him and submit to his righteousness. And let us so live to his glory here, that we may shine forth as the sun in his kingdom, "for ever and ever. Amen."

SERMON XXIII.



ON RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

Luke, xvi. 8.

The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

“IT is good,” says an apostle, “to be zealously affected in a good thing.” Men are often, and very generally, actuated by an ardent zeal in the pursuit of worldly things, though many of them, far from being good, are vain and sinful. Among the objects of a wise and laudable zeal, none is more excellent than the Christian religion. This is the most profitable pursuit; it is the noblest object which can engage the attention of a human being; for it has respect to the honour of God, and the eternal happiness of mankind. But our blessed Lord has in this text declared, and by the parable which precedes it he has shown, that “the children of this world;” that men in the concerns of the present life, in the pursuit of wealth, and honour, and pleasure, are more ardent, active and careful, than Christians are in what regards their faith and religious practice. The authority of the

person who makes this remark, and our daily observation, leave no ground to doubt of its truth ; and it is a fact, which certainly should awaken in the minds of those “who profess and call themselves Christians,” the most serious concern.

It is true that many Christians, of various names and description, manifest great zeal for promoting the honour, and interest, and increase of their own sects, and respective denominations, and there are still those, who “compass sea and land to make one proselyte.” But sectarian zeal, which is not primarily for the honour of God and the promotion of Christ’s religion, but chiefly for tenets or points peculiar to their own party, and which distinguish, and because they distinguish them from other Christian societies, is not the wisdom which our Lord here recommends. In such party zeal, as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, we are carnal, and walk as men ; we are actuated by worldly wisdom, and do no more than “the children of this world ;” “publicans and sinners do the same.” Wisdom of this sort, however ardent, however active, however prevalent among the disciples of Christ, does not, nor can it affect the correctness of his words in our text ; that his disciples, generally speaking, do not feel or manifest such earnest concern, such awakened diligence, such prudent, consistent and persevering efforts to honour God, to do his will, and promote the cause of pure religion, as worldly men manifest and feel for temporal things, the fading goods of time and sense. This is a deplorable weakness, a folly which would be incredible, were it not so obvious and common. It is a fault exposed and complained of, not in our text only,

but throughout the scriptures. That subject excepted, which, in the word of God is ever most prominent and conspicuous, his mercy to men in Jesus Christ, there is none so often and continually met with, as the carelessness and unconcern with which his people receive his mercies; the languor with which we labour for the bread of life; the heaviness with which our souls advance “to reach eternal joys.”

This then, is a subject on which they must often preach, who would faithfully declare all the counsel of God. On this theme must they who sit upon the watch tower in Zion, “reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.” It will not, if the Lord vouchsafe his blessing, be deemed a subject ill chosen, nor be found unprofitable. And nothing, perhaps, will more clearly evince the truth of our Lord’s remark, and be more likely to impress upon our minds a sense of its importance, than contrasting the zeal, and prudence, and activity of worldly men in their various pursuits of life, with the supineness, inconsistency, and negligence of Christians in similar situations; and to such contrast or comparison, the text does indeed direct us.

First, then, religion or Christian life, is in the scriptures often and aptly compared to husbandry; to that culture of the soil by which we obtain the bread of this life, and feed and clothe our bodies. The husbandman is wise in his generation; he attends carefully to every branch of his business, and in its most proper season. With all necessary labour he prepares the soil, selects the choicest seed, secures his crop by fences, and aids its growth by tillage.

“Behold,” saith an apostle, “the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain.” He sows by faith, he labours in hope, and endures with patience. He seldom reaps immediate benefit; he buries in the earth that corn, which (in many cases) he needs for present use, trusting, that through the bounty of a kind providence, it will bring forth increase. “He sows not that body which shall be.” He often denies himself desired rest, and many present comforts; submits cheerfully to present expense and many difficulties; and with patient diligence toils through many a tedious day, and all this in expectation of a future harvest.

And is the Christian equally wise in his spiritual husbandry? Is he equally careful not to lose his seasons of grace, and to neglect no means of religious improvement? With like patience and self-denial, with the same cheerful perseverance in the hope of the joy that is set before him, and faith that in due time he shall reap if he faint not, does the Christian labour for a harvest of future blessedness? Alas, how deplorable does he fall short of this wisdom! What favourable opportunities, what excellent seasons, are neglected! Often is the disciple of Jesus weary in well doing. Hours, and days, and whole seasons, he passes in idleness, indulging in “a little sleep, a little slumber and folding of the hands to sleep,” even while a voice from heaven is calling, “Awake thou that sleepest!” The Christian seems to forget the harvest which is to come, and scarcely to labour in hope. He is impatient of the present

sacrifice; he has not faith to cast his bread upon the waters; "light afflictions which are (comparatively) but for a moment," bear him down.

2. The merchant is wise in the pursuit of gain. He takes advantage of whatever is favourable to his business, and eagerly engages in such traffic as is likely to be profitable. If he discovers "a pearl of great price," the possession of which would make his fortune, he would readily sell all to purchase it, and if necessary, the field which contains it; there is no sacrifice that he would not make to acquire such a treasure. And such a treasure, and infinitely more valuable as our Lord has shown, is the kingdom of heaven; but small in comparison, is the price which men seem willing to pay for it. Do we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Are we ready to sell all and forsake all, for the treasures of eternal life? No; we incline to complain that Christ's yoke is heavy; that the Sabbath is a burden; that the cross cannot be borne.

3. View the wisdom of the mariner; his eye, his heart, and hopes, are continually toward the haven where he would be. He shapes his course to the best advantage, and never neglects his watch nor quits the helm. He spreads his canvass to each propitious gale, and carefully takes advantage of every breath of wind; he examines his maps and charts, and cautiously avoids the rocks and shoals where danger lurks and where others have suffered shipwreck. Now the Spirit of God, which is the Christian's life, is like "the wind which bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof," but do not with like care regard its godly motions.

Are Christians equally vigilant? Do they mark on the map of life those rocks of vice where others have perished, and shun them? By the unvarying compass of God's word do we as constantly keep our true course to the immortal shores and haven of eternal rest? How inevitable would be the seaman's destruction, were he as careless in his duty as most Christians are in religion.

4. The Christian's life is compared to a journey. Place "the children of this world" in that situation; behold him who travels on the earth and seeks a country in this present world. Mark his solicitude and care to know and keep the right way, and "turn not to the right hand or to the left." If he stops, it is for necessary refreshment, and to obtain strength that he may make the better speed. And if by carelessness or accident he lose the best way, and some time be wasted in a wrong direction, he endeavours to redeem the time by redoubled diligence and caution.

And in this, generally speaking, they are much "wiser than the children of light." We are blest with a sure guide "in the way in which we should go;" God's word is a lantern to our feet and a light to our path; but often, and almost continually, our steps depart from his testimonies. Our feet are not as they should be, "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." Almost constantly does the Christian pilgrim linger on his way, and frequently he errs and strays from it like a lost sheep. "Thus," saith the Lord, (by his prophet Jeremiah,) "stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your

souls. But they said, we will not walk therein." And many there are who still say the same.

5. Christianity is also likened to a race which men run for a temporal prize. And how do the children of this world run? St. Paul, who probably had been an eye witness of such exhibitions, tells us, that "they who run in a race, run all, though one receiveth the prize." The competitors were many, and of course the chance of victory but small; but still they pressed eagerly to the contest. We may well wonder that they should be at much pains in preparing to contend for so doubtful a prize, a prize too, which when obtained, was of little real worth; a fading crown of leaves perhaps, or a wreath of flowers. But they were at the utmost pains in the preparation; "every one who strove for this mastery was temperate in all things." For months previous to the contest, they carefully avoided all pleasure and luxury which would enervate their bodies, weaken their strength, or impede their swiftness. All this, and every thing possible, would they gladly do, for the uncertain hope of empty praise. "They do it," says the apostle, "for a corruptible crown; we for an incorruptible." Most transcendent is the glory, and infinitely superior the motives, which call us to the Christian race. The spectators of the contest are saints on earth, and angels in heaven. Christ is "the mark of the prize of our high calling;" and God is himself the Judge. The reward of this victory is "a crown which fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens." Nor is it a doubtful reward; we contend not "as they who beat the air;" every one who "runs with patience the race that is set before

him," shall be "conqueror, and more than conqueror, through him who loves us." What temperance then, and patience, and ardour, and perseverance, may we not look for in the children of light? What is there possible which might not reasonably be expected? But what is the fact as daily seen? Faith is shamed, and charity weeps at the comparison.

6. No less often, and no less aptly, is a religious life in the holy scriptures compared to a warfare; and a warfare it is, in which most truly we contend for liberty and life, and against the only enemies who can truly harm us. They who are enlightened by the doctrines of Christ have little reason to fear what man can do unto them. "We fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Of course, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal;" were they carnal, little would they avail in this "good fight of faith." It is necessary to "put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand." Now observe how wisely the children of this world conduct their warfare. They arm themselves with weapons offensive and defensive. They continually watch against the arts and the movements of their adversaries, and are in constant preparation for every possible attack. They are willingly trained to the use of arms; they patiently submit to very severe discipline; and are ever on the alert, that they may not be surprised. "No man (of them) that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him, who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Promotion and glory being

his objects, he devotes his time and all his energies to the business and duties of his profession.

And is it thus with the Christian? Has he the same devotedness to his profession? And is he equally desirous and careful to please the Captain of his salvation, who has chosen him to be a soldier? Is he equally vigilant, prompt and active against the enemies of his soul? No; we carelessly expose ourselves to temptation; we are not sufficiently diligent to make our calling and election sure; we do not add to our faith virtue; we are negligent in putting on the Christian armour, the girdle of truth, the breast-plate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. It is unnecessary, as it would be painful, to show how much in every particular, worldly men exceed us here in wisdom; how much the soldier of Christ does entangle himself with the affairs of this life; how madly he exposes himself to the shafts of his foes; how impatient he is of discipline, and how apt to yield in the field of battle. Many, very many Christians, do not "walk circumspectly." Should the soldier of this world conduct his warfare with such imprudence and inattention, how sure and inevitable would be his ruin, and how disgraceful his defeat!

7. Permit me to ask your still further attention to the wisdom of men in worldly things. Where interest or safety requires it, if wealth or pleasure will be promoted thereby, they will unite in their exertions; they make friendships, form alliances, and live in peace. Men of the same sect or party will patiently bear, and will readily overlook each other's

failings, that they may promote their common interest, and strengthen their cause. Nations finding by dear bought experience, the evils of "wars and fightings," gladly negotiate and live in peace. And most devoutly is it to be wished, that Christians were as wise in their generation. Gladly and most thankfully do we acknowledge, that among the disciples of the blessed Saviour, is found much of love, and harmony, and of every godly affection. But what is exceedingly to be deplored, there is also remaining much of the leaven of malice, and of the evils of dissention. That Christians should judge variously respecting some doctrines of the bible, and of the order and discipline of Christ's church, is no more than must, from the nature of religion, and the imperfections of men, reasonably be expected. That such difference of sentiment should cause Christians to divide into separate communities, though much to be deplored, is a too natural consequence. But what is infinitely worse, and totally unnecessary, these divisions produce "envying and strife;" and where these are, "there is confusion and every evil work." Not to speak of the enmity and disorder often and most unhappily seen among private Christians, how deplorable is the uncharitableness which so much and so long subsists between different sects and denominations! and often on account of some slight shades of difference in judgment or opinion, between members of the same denomination! Very much, and very often, in contending for things of little or no importance, they depart from the spirit, and materially injure the essential interests of true religion. Is it thus we follow the example of him, who, while we were yet sinners,

died for us? Is it thus we love one another, as he gave us commandment? Tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Constantinople, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised Heathen should rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised Mussulman should triumph.

8. Worldly people are wisely diligent in the use of means, and of all proper helps in accomplishing the ends which they have in view. To neglect these, they would deem the greatest folly. Though the husbandman cannot command the sun to warm, nor the rains to refresh his grounds; though his corn, whether he sleeps or wakes, springs up he knows not how, first the blade, and then the stalk, and after that the ear, yet he is not the less careful and diligent to plough and sow, without which he could not hope to reap. The mariner still spreads his sail to the wind, and ventures on his course, though he knows not what storms or calms, a day or an hour may bring forth. In this they are generally wiser than Christians, many of whom neglect the means of grace. "The manner of some, is to neglect the assembling of themselves together" for social worship; our congregations are thin, and the preacher must often speak to empty pews. The scriptures are too little read, and they are less known. At the Lord's table "still there is room;" and though "all things are now ready," and thousands are invited, the guests are few. Deplorable is the neglect of family devotions; and private prayer, it may well be feared, is not more faithfully performed. The rivers of Damascus are thought to be better than the waters of Israel, and without dipping in Jordan, men hope to be clean.

9. God, as his word declares, has a controversy with his people; and it is of the most serious concern, involving their immortal welfare. But he is a merciful Judge, and is willing to hear an advocate on our behalf; and most singular and wonderful is the mercy, that “we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous.” It is not uncommon that men, in their worldly concerns, have suits depending before an earthly tribunal; it would be well if it were less frequent. And we know well in such cases, how great is the anxiety of the parties, and how very much regard they have to the final decision. They indeed neglect nothing which is likely to promote their suit, or necessary to gain their cause. And are we as much awakened and equally attentive to the merits of the issue of that awful trial which awaits us in another world? Do we in like manner, take every precaution, and use every effort, to obtain a favourable decision? Do we ever consider what witnesses we are daily sending up to heaven? What testimony these hours, so rapidly departing, may bear against us?

10. Your patience will be burdened with but one example more; and let it be that which Christ has himself given, and to which the text has reference. Suppose that a rich man has a steward, who is to be discharged for unfaithfulness. He would be likely to devise something to benefit himself and to mitigate the evil. Though unaccustomed to labour, and ashamed to beg, if no better alternative were left him, he would with all expedition call his lord’s debtors, and remit a part of what they owed; thus laying them under obligation to aid him in time of

need. We are in like manner, accused of being unjust stewards, and are soon by death to be dismissed from this our present state. And do we also use this short intervening time in making the best possible provision for our future welfare? Can we, like him in the parable, be commended as having done wisely? Do we make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? Do we now, with all diligence, now in a time accepted, make such use of the things and means which are lent us here, that when we fail in this world, we may be received into everlasting habitations? No; with shame we must acknowledge, that Christians are not generally so wise. Though God now commands all men every where to repent, and has revealed to us the terrors of a final judgment, we have not the like awakened concern about our future state. We seem to forget that we shall be judged according to our works; we are not as we should be, diligent in labouring to lay up treasures in heaven. We are not as we should be, "ready to give, glad to distribute," "unwearied in well doing," "laying up for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may attain eternal life."

Thus is it but too evident, how much wiser in their generation, are the children of this world than the children of light. But to no good purpose shall we see this, except the comparison shall awaken us to a sense of our folly and make us wiser. The subject is unquestionably of very serious and very general concern. This, our Lord's reproof, just as it is severe, should both humble and alarm us. Is it indeed the fact, that we are more concerned for this world, than the next; for our bodies than our souls;

for time than eternity? Are we more anxious, and do we labour and strive more for the fleeting vanities of this present life, than for all those glories of the eternal world, which the God of mercy has promised us in his blessed Son? With humbleness of mind and deep contrition of heart and soul, let us deplore this our weakness and folly, and earnestly beseech God that he will renew our hearts day by day, and sanctify us more and more by his Holy Spirit; and let us by all means, and in every way apply ourselves, and exert every power of body and mind, to become more deeply concerned for our future welfare, and more zealous and active in the Redeemer's cause. What of all things we should most desire is, that the Spirit which was in him may be in us. He has taught us by his apostle, that if any man lack wisdom he must ask of God, without whom we can do nothing. Next after praying for his grace, it is most important to hearken to the counsels of his word. "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." We should endeavour, in a greater and better degree, to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only," in which no doubt many deceive themselves, supposing that reading the scriptures or hearing sermons, is in itself meritorious, or doing God service, though we do not obey his word. To hear his word and yet neglect to do his will, is adding to our sin.

By reflecting too on the short period of this present life, and how imperfect at best and unsatisfactory are all terrestrial enjoyments, we should endeavour to esteem them less, and so to use the world as not abusing it. And by duly considering how incom-

parably greater are the joys of heaven; how infinitely important are the concerns of the soul, and our eternal salvation in Jesus Christ, we should strive to be more interested in religion. For this end it will be of much use to observe the wisdom of worldly men, what they willingly do to obtain doubtful and temporal things. Their labours and perseverance, and self-denial, show you what may be done, and what we ought to do. Will not we be as careful for our souls, as they for their bodies? If the avaricious are never weary of labouring to increase their wealth, shall not we be as diligent to grow in grace?

God's mercies which are past, if we rightly view them, will encourage us to hope for future blessings; he that begins in you a good work will finish it; the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. The progress which you have already made in the Christian life, may well encourage you to press forward towards the mark of the prize of your high calling. When the psalmist was dejected, and it seemed that God had forsaken him, he acknowledged that this was his own infirmity, and encouraged himself to trust in God and go forward by calling to mind his former mercies. "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most Highest. I will remember the works of the Lord, and call to mind the wonders of old time." Finally, while worldly men are bowing to a thousand idols, let us fear and serve the living God. They rejoice in their own wisdom and their own works; "Let Israel rejoice in him who made him, and the children of Zion be glad in their King." If songs of joy and exultation are sung to the gods of this world, let us chant still louder strains

of glory and praise to the Lord Jehovah. If to accomplish their favourite pursuits, they are selfish and unfeeling, and elated with pride, let us “do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”

And may the God of all mercy awaken our zeal, direct our hearts, and strengthen our hands to do his will; and to him be rendered eternal praise. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.



ON HASTY, INCONSIDERATE ZEAL.

1 Chron. xv. 12, 13.

Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.

ST. PAUL writes to Timothy, "If a man strive for masteries he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully." And the same apostle testifies of the Jews, "that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Their striving was in their own strength, and according to their own wisdom and corrupt desires, and of course they were not crowned, but rejected. In regard to the moral conduct of mankind, their motives and intentions are no doubt of most importance. But in regard to positive institutions, and religious rites and performances, they are generally of little use but as they are conformable to the will and appointment of Almighty God. On this subject, the history with which our text is connected, will give us useful instruction.

When David was raised to the throne, the ark of God had probably remained some time in obscurity, at a place called Kirjah-Jearim, and the nation had not made that religious use of it which their law required. But when this monarch was well established in the government, and had taken possession of the Hill of Zion, he summoned a large assembly, even thirty thousand chosen men of Israel, that they might remove the ark to the city of David. But in doing it they did not strive lawfully. "They set the ark of God upon a new cart," which was imitating the Philistines, rather than obeying the law of God; for his law required that it should be carried upon men's shoulders. For a while they proceeded with great joy and thanksgiving, but at length the oxen which drew the cart stumbled, and the ark was shaken; and Uzza, one of those who drove the oxen, and perhaps one who advised to this mode of conveying it, fearing that the ark might fall, or receive some injury, "took hold of it." This also was contrary to God's law, which forbade any one but the priests to touch it, on pain of death. Presuming thus to violate the law, he incurred the penalty; the Lord smote Uzza, and he immediately died.

This signal manifestation of divine displeasure, filled David and all the people with such awe and fear, that they durst not then proceed. And it had the intended effect of setting them to inquire with more diligence and care, how the ark should be removed. And when for this purpose the king had summoned the heads of their tribes, he explained to them the right manner of proceeding; and calling the priests and Levites, he added the words read for

our text; "Sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel, unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us; for that we sought him not after the due order." God, he says, had punished them with a heavy judgment; had struck Uzza dead, because in serving him they had departed from the rule of his word; they did not strictly observe his law.

This breach which was made upon them, some may think, was too severe, and be inclined to charge God foolishly. David himself was at first displeased. To some, it may still seem strange and unaccountable, that a good man, as for aught that appears to the contrary, Uzza was; one who was piously engaged in a religious duty, and sincerely endeavouring to honour God, should be killed for so small an offence; for an act perhaps, of inadvertency, or one which was done with good interest, and to preserve the ark from injury. To all petulence of murmuring, we might well say, in the words of an apostle, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" It was the Lord's doing, and of course perfectly just and right.

But (with reverence, lest we should commit the like fault as Uzza,) let it be supposed that he was guilty of no intentional departure from God's commandment; that what he did, was from the agitation of the moment, without time to recollect, and perhaps not knowing what the law had forbidden; that he verily thought that he was doing God service; suppose that he was a good man and truly religious. And

what just inference will follow? Is it cruel or any way wrong in the Almighty, to take a good man from this world? "It is appointed unto all men once to die." That judgment indeed, as the people viewed it, was awfully alarming, and was intended so to be; but if he was a good man, to the survivors only was it dreadful. One death he must have died, and by a death less painful, perhaps no man has ever left the world. To him it was not so painful as a death by sickness.

And we may observe generally, that judgments of this sort, are not so much for a punishment of those who die, as to teach those who survive, to fear God and obey his laws. Our personal punishment, as individual sinners, is not to be in this world, but in a future state. The most wicked man may live long and be prosperous to the end of life. The warning given to the living, by the manner and circumstances of Uzza's death, is the same, whether he were a good man or bad.

The like observations may be extended to other innumerable instances. Suppose that in the immense host of Pharaoh which was drowned in the Red Sea, there were many hundreds of good men; that from their intercourse with the Israelites and the judgments sent upon Egypt, they had become believers in the true God; they did but suffer death which is common to men; and to good men, dying young is really no evil. In a future state they will all, good or bad, be judged as others. And whatever may have been their moral or religious characters, the manner of their death fulfilled the purpose of God; it causes his providence and power to be shown, and

his name to be declared throughout the earth. Such judgments, when rightly viewed, are not so much severity to those who die, as a mercy to those who still live. Of the character of the dead, or what is their state in another world, we are not to judge; but should consider well what instruction the circumstances of their deaths were designed to give. After the Israelites themselves had been conducted safely through the sea, and were delivered from their enemies, they often murmured and provoked God by their disobedience. As a judgment upon them, he declared that those above twenty years old, when they left Egypt, should never reach the land which had been promised them, but should wander till they perished in the wilderness. Suppose that in that vast number were some who never did murmur; or suppose that many or even all of them afterward repented, still the judgment was both just and wise in God; it taught the Israelites, and it teaches Christians, that they must persevere in the faith and fear of God, or lose their final reward; that, as the Lord says by his prophet Ezekiel, if the righteous man turn away from his righteousness and commit iniquity, he shall die in his sins. And so in this case of Uzza's death, whatever may have been his religious character, we are taught that zeal should be tempered by knowledge and wisdom, and be guided by the word of God. Zeal in itself considered, is not here or any where condemned; it is not offensive, but pleasing to God. The piety of David, and the elders of Israel, in revering the ark of God, and removing it to a place more suitable for divine worship, was highly commendable, and no doubt approved of

God, even at the time of his making a breach upon them. Uzza's zeal was probably pleasing to God, but not his disobedience. "To obey is better than sacrifice." Zeal for a good thing is itself good ; but it is not the only good. And however little of sin we may suppose there was in Uzza's inconsiderate touching of the ark, there is much important instruction given to us and to all men in his death ; and chiefly we are taught that our zeal, through want of consideration, may hurry us into that which is sinful and offensive to God. Such was the case of Saul of Tarsus, when, from a blind zeal, he "persecuted the church of God." He verily thought that Christians were the opposers of God, and that he ought to oppose them. And he did so ; he dragged them to prison and to death. Had he done this from a worldly motive, or the impulse of some evil passion, his conduct would have been still more wicked. His desire to honour God was in itself good, and was no doubt a palliation of his guilt ; and accordingly, he obtained, he says, mercy, because he did it ignorantly. But still his ignorance was a sin ; for he might, and he ought to have known better, what was the Lord's word and will. And after his conversion, he ever viewed it as a sin ; and felt himself unworthy to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God. We are bound to make ourselves well acquainted with the religion which we profess ; to regard its principles, and observe its precepts. If we serve God, it must be by that which he requires ; if we draw nigh unto him, it must be in the way which he directs.

Our text then calls us to consider the evils and the peril resulting from a hasty, inconsiderate zeal; or more strictly speaking, in our efforts to promote religion and good morals, and to honour God, the evil of neglecting his word and revealed will. And in applying the subject to our own practice, that we may be preserved against the peril of such blindness, and through God's blessing make due improvement from the scriptures before us, let us learn these two things; religiously to observe God's word, and carefully to avoid rash judgment.

I. The manner of Uzza's death teaches us to observe most conscientiously the word of God; and how perilous it is to "depart from the holy commandment delivered unto us." That God delights in "due order," is visible in his works of creation, no less than in his spiritual kingdom. If we would please him, we must "not turn to the right hand or to the left," from the way which he has ordained for us to walk in. No zeal, however ardent or sincere, will be accepted as a substitute for obedience, nor justify any neglect or violation of God's commands. This truth has he taught us by many signal judgments. Behold the zeal of Corah, Dathan, and Abiram. They contended much for the honour of God, and most strenuously opposed what they deemed usurped authority. But with an awful judgment the Lord destroyed them. King Saul was actuated by a blind zeal when he offered sacrifice contrary to the Lord's direction; in consequence he lost his kingdom and his life. The Samaritans were zealous for the law of Moses, and thought themselves the most perfect worshippers of

the God of Abraham ; but from their hatred of the Jews, they rejected some parts of the true religion, and especially the scriptures which taught them “that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship;” and therefore our Saviour tells them, “Ye worship ye know not what ; we know what we worship ; for salvation is of the Jews.” Other examples we might as well bring, to show that we must worship God, not only in spirit, but in truth.

This subject is of very extensive application. In all the government and discipline, the doctrines and the worship of Christ’s church, we are bound so to sanctify ourselves, that we may “seek him after the due order.” Christ, for instance, has a visible church, and it is essential that we should be members of it. Christians are unhappily divided into sects; it becomes of course our duty to inquire, and know, so far as we can do it, which of them is most conformed in its doctrines, and government, and worship, to the primitive church. And with that church, we ought conscientiously to unite, without regard to worldly motives.

Our Saviour Christ has appointed sacraments and other ordinances, as memorials of his goodness and love, and the sanctified means of building us up in his holy faith ; and we should, as God shall give us grace, so sanctify ourselves by knowledge, and penitence, and faith, as rightly to receive them.

So too, in the ministry of the word and sacraments, there is a due order which should be observed. Christ glorified not himself to be made a priest, and no man can take the honour to himself without sinful presumption. Self-created ambassadors of Christ

touch the ark with unhallowed hands. And whatever plausible things we may say of their zeal and success, and of their good intentions, we cannot justify their departing from the due order which Christ has established in his church. If any one, according to his own pleasure, might take this honour to himself, there could be no regular ministry in the church; the people could never know who are the ministers of Christ, nor whom to regard as their spiritual guides. In the early ages of Christianity, the most pious felt themselves the least worthy of such an office; and the language of inspiration was, "Who is sufficient for these things?" With great reluctance and trepidation, and not without fasting and prayer, were holy orders then received. Many of the most eminent Bishops at first declined the office when urged upon them, nor would they consent, till in a manner compelled. At the present day, we see comparatively but little of the like diffidence; but few who seem to feel themselves unqualified to represent the Saviour of the world. On the contrary, it is painful to see with how little fear or apprehension; with what confidence and unconcern, so far as appearances will authorize us to judge, some take upon themselves the tremendous responsibility of this ministry.

"Sanctify yourselves, ye that bear (or would bear) the vessels of the Lord." They who are possessed of the gifts and talents necessary "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ," and think themselves ever so well qualified to exercise their ministry, should wait till they are truly "called

of God;" till they can enter the sheepfold through the door which the Lord has opened; nor can they well be too cautious not to run before they are sent. If labourers are wanted, let us pray the Lord to send them; but not presume to take the honour to ourselves.

II. In many other things which might be noticed, Christians are prone in their hasty zeal, to go beyond the word of the Lord our God, to do less or more; but we proceed now to what was secondly proposed, the danger and sin of rash judgment. And this I would notice especially, as it regards the attributes, the word, and the providence of God. In all these, men are liable to take hold of the ark unlawfully.

1. Secret things belong to God; but they are often spoken of, and treated as though they belong to men. There is too much reason to believe, that sincere Christians very frequently sin against God, and dishonour him in their zealous efforts to advance his glory, and to do him service. There is a strong, and were it less common, we might say a strange propensity, to neglect what God has clearly revealed, and to pry into those things which are "secret to us." Often do men attempt to excuse the dispensations and providence of God, with a boldness of manner, which is without excuse. Metaphysical speculations are too much indulged; the results of human reason are sometimes taught as being a part of Christianity; and principles are maintained, which, though we dare not perhaps deny, we may well wonder at the temerity of those who advance them. There is among Christians a great want of reverence and consideration in

speaking of God, and of spiritual things. We are apt to forget that he is in heaven and we upon earth. Many speak of matter and of spirit; of God's being and attributes; of his purpose, and the system of his moral government of the world; subjects on which we ought scarce to think without trembling; on these subjects, awful and inscrutable as they are, do many speak and dogmatize, with the same assurance, as though capable of mathematical demonstration; or, as if (which is indeed sometimes affirmed,) the immortal destinies of the human race, depended on a conformity to their opinions. Subjects, mysterious and awfully sublime, are frequently treated with a culpable familiarity. In support of favourite systems, purposes and decrees are ascribed to the Almighty, which we could not reconcile with the character of a good man. The Supreme Being is often addressed in language, and in a manner which would be offensive, if offered to one of our fellow men, who is entitled to our respect.

Whether then, you speak to God in acts of devotion, or of him in discoursing to men, never be forgetful that the utmost reverence is to be preserved. And beyond what is written, beyond what he has revealed of himself, and of his ways, you are never to step but with fear and trembling. Read the book of Job; observe with what pious zeal, and as men at first would judge, with what fitness and wisdom his friends speak of God; how they vindicate his dealings and extol his attributes; and how they censure Job for his want of resignation and trust in God. But when you read the last chapter of that book, it appears that God's wrath was enkindled against them,

because they had not spoken of him the thing that was right. They were directed to offer sacrifice, and to ask Job to pray for them, that their presumption, in discoursing so freely of God and of his providence, might be forgiven them. And Job himself, wisely as he had spoken, acknowledges that he had uttered what he understood not; things too wonderful for him, which he knew not. He therefore abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes. If these good men, whose words we still read with profit and delight, offended in speaking of things too high for them, what must be said of those who take still greater liberties in speaking of God's secret counsels and eternal purpose, and who assign to the Almighty principles of government, which, however ingenious or probable, may not be the truth? As well may the glow-worm give light to the sun, or infinity be measured by feet and inches, as the reason of man embrace the wisdom of God. It was a comfort to the psalmist, that he had "not exercised himself in great matters, nor in things too high for him." St. Paul was very sensible of the "depths of God's wisdom;" that "his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." Though the ark is shaken, let us well consider how we are authorized to touch it. Even the objections of infidelity, and the scoffs of the wicked, are not to be opposed by words without knowledge; otherwise we may injure religion more in defending, than others do in opposing it. Why should we pretend to unite the knot of every difficulty, which occurs in moral and religious investigations? Let us be content that secret things should belong to God, and wait with patience for that time

when we shall no longer “see through a glass darkly, and prophesy in part” only; when we shall “see face to face, and know even as we are known.” Such modesty and caution should we use, when we speak of God’s foreknowledge, predestination, and secret will; of the volitions of men, and of the sovereignty of divine grace. What God has said, we may safely teach; beyond that, let us not presume. Hearken how God, in the book of Job, vindicates himself: To all the petulance and presumption of man, he answers from the whirlwind, “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? I will demand of thee, and answer thou me: Where wast thou, when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who laid the measure thereof, or stretched a line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations fastened, or who laid the corner stone, when the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea within doors, and made a cloud for its garments; or said, thus far shalt thou come, and here shall thy proud waves be staid? Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty, instruct him? Wilt thou disannul my judgment? Hast thou an arm like God, or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?” Let us answer these questions before we meddle with still higher mysteries. The best defence of God’s ways is the knowledge and confession of our own ignorance.

2. With equal interest and use, our subject may be applied to the exposition of the holy scriptures. Here the ark is handled with great presumption. The knowledge of the holy scriptures men often think themselves possessed of, and qualified to teach,

without learning, or talents, or study. And what better can we expect as the consequence, than what St. Peter notices; that the “unlearned, and the unstable, should wrest them to their own destruction,” and not unfrequently, we may fear, to the destruction of others. If the scriptures are the word of God, their exposition surely is a business of the most serious consequence and awful concern. Most unpardonable must be the presumption of advancing our own crude conceptions as the testimony of Jesus; the teachings of God’s Holy Spirit; the immutable counsels of the infinite Jehovah. Let us be sure that we know before we teach; or let our teaching be with modest diffidence and becoming humility. Here especially, in declaring God’s will to men, let us banish pride. Better it is a thousand fold, that our ignorance be exposed, and our pride abased, than that the souls of men should be in peril, and we should darken ourselves by words without knowledge.

3. The last caution, which in the application of this subject I would suggest, is against rash judgment respecting providential events. “There were some who told Jesus of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices; and Jesus answering said unto them, suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things; or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay.” The judgment which our Lord here condemns, is not uncommon. It is natural, though very unreasonable and unchristian, to judge of men’s characters from their misfortunes or

prosperity. Designs and enterprises, however daring, imprudent, or presumptuous, if they are very successful, are generally much applauded. They who prosper in this world, are supposed of course, to be the favourites of heaven. If doctrines spread and rapidly increase, the ready sentence is, they are of God. If our enemies or opponents suffer loss or any adversity, we are too ready to construe it a judgment of heaven declarative of their faults; a judicial visitation. And generally, those who are much afflicted in this world, we incline to suppose are sinners more than others. The supposition is erroneous, the judgment rash. In many, very many instances, "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth the son whom he receiveth." Was the false prophet of Mecca sent of God, because his arms were prosperous, and his religion was spread over a large part of the world? Were the apostles of our Saviour sinners more than others, because they were "of all men" most persecuted, and seemingly "most miserable?" Too often is it a fact, that as St. James says, we are "not doers of the law, but judges." It is not for us to fathom the counsels of the Almighty, nor to say for what end men in this world suffer affliction. It has already been observed, and I trust that with none of you there can remain a doubt, that many of those signal and most tremendous judgments recorded in the holy scriptures, were inflicted not so much to show us the character of the sufferers, as to warn us to repent, lest we also perish. The sudden and awful death of one of them, especially was, as we have seen, to teach us the necessity of strictly observing the word of God; and that no zeal for his

honour or worship, can justify any departure from his commandments. If we would serve God acceptably, we must follow his direction; if we would seek him, it must be after that due order which he has himself appointed.

And if so, if such be the main inferences, then sanctify yourselves. Endeavour more and more, in heart and life, to be conformed to the word and will of God. Worship him, not only with the spirit, but with the understanding, and in truth. All the rites and ordinances which the Lord has appointed, be careful, according to their nature and design, religiously to observe. His church you are to enter as an ark of refuge, but not to touch it contrary to his word. Do nothing to hinder or disturb its unity, nor to cause or perpetuate divisions. Carefully avoid all rash judgment and uncharitable censures; and “be not hasty to utter any thing before God,” respecting either his nature, his word, or his providence. View him as exalted above the heavens, and infinite in every perfection. Remember that he is wise and good, whilst we are blind and sinful; and that to speak of him and his ways, beyond what he has revealed to us, is to “darken counsel by words without knowledge.”

From such sin and such peril, may the Lord in his mercy preserve us all, through his love to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXV.



THE UNFRUITFUL HARVEST.

Jeremiah, viii. 20—22.

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people, am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

It is an error, or natural propensity of fallen man, to trust in the world; to confide in his own wisdom, or in the things of this life, rather than in him who made and governs all things. The deceitfulness and misery of such an earthly confidence, is clearly exemplified in the history of the Jews; in that part of their history particularly, to which the prophet in these words has reference. Notwithstanding the solemn and often repeated admonitions given them to trust in God, and the painful experience they often had of the peril and folly of departing from his word, they were at this very time trusting in the Egyptians, as their aid and support against their enemies. Here we behold Jeremiah, with great tenderness and deep

anxiety, lamenting their infatuation, and endeavouring to awaken in their minds repentance and a sense of their duty. In this text he first represents the complaint of the people, and their despondence in a state which seemed so hopeless. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." The season has expired, and the time gone by, when we expected deliverance; but we look in vain for help from our friends; the Egyptians afford us no relief. The prophet then expresses his own feelings for their distress; "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt. I am black; astonishment hath taken hold upon me." He sympathized deeply in their misery; he was violently exercised, like a person in the agonies of death.

He next inquires if there be no remedy in such a case; "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Were there no means of relief? Was there no one able and willing to deliver them from their distress? Yes, certainly; he supposes, he takes it as a point which no one can doubt or question, that there is a remedy at hand; there is a physician infinitely able to give relief. And therefore, he concludes by asking, "Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" And a very pertinent question it is. Why should we languish with sickness when a remedy is within our reach? Why did the people remain in that wretched state, when the Lord their God was able and willing to give them deliverance?

Such, in its primary application to the Jews, is the sense of this passage. But those careless worldly souls, have long since been called to the eternal world

to give account to Him who knew their hearts, and saw their perverseness. With them we have no concern. But in the more general and true application of the text, it is to be feared that we are deeply interested. It will direct our attention to the case of those who have lost their seasons of grace; also to the wretchedness of their state, and how they may be delivered from it. The view of a subject in which we are so nearly concerned, it is hoped, will be found profitable. And let us not forget to look with praying hearts to Him who alone has power to make it so.

I. First then, there are people to whom the first part of this text may be applied, of whom we fear it may still be said, that their "harvest is past, their summer is ended, and they are not saved." It was aptly applied to the case of the Jews, who had not received succour and deliverance at the time expected; who, by trusting in human aid, had provoked the Lord Jehovah to withdraw his protecting arm, and expose them to their enemies. Through their weakness of faith, and love of the world, they had lost the fittest and most favourable season of imploring aid from heaven. But with equal fitness and propriety, we may apply it to those who neglect the time and means of salvation, from their spiritual foes, sin and death, and final perdition. Seasons and opportunities of repentance, and conversion, of growth in grace, and working out our final salvation, are very aptly, and therefore very often compared to the summer of the natural year, when we till the ground and sow the seed, and reap the fruits of the earth in abundant harvests. It is more than possible, it is

not uncommon, to neglect these seasons of spiritual husbandry ; to pass the summer in idleness and sloth.

Look on the season of youth ; consider how favourable an opportunity young people have to escape the snares of sin, by early walking in the way of God's command, and acquiring habits of piety and good living. As men advance in age, without religion, the mind becomes callous, and hardened in transgression, and is with far more difficulty awakened to righteousness. In youth, the mind is docile, the conscience tender, ~~and the~~ moral sense is more acute. The mind, not yet corrupted by vicious courses, nor rendered callous by sinful habits, not spoiled through vain philosophy nor the pride of reason, is then in the best state to receive instruction, to imbibe the wholesome principles of truth and righteousness, and the renovating doctrines of the Saviour's cross. Youth is the time for remembering the Creator, and becoming the disciples of a meek Saviour. It is the natural season for devoting ourselves to God ; it is the time most favourable to religion. But how often is this blessed season lost ! In many, very many cases, this spring of life is given up to vanities and folly ; the summer is wasted in spiritual idleness ; and in the autumn of life, instead of a rich harvest of grace and wisdom, they are poor and hopeless.

With no less fitness our subject applies to those who make no religious improvement from providential events. Time would fail to number the calls and admonitions to repentance and amendment, which the Lord in mercy sends us ; and how often are they sent in vain ! In the just, and wise, and gracious dealings of his providence, various afflictions and judgments

are sent to awaken men to righteousness; and yet they sleep on and take their rest. In "many unhappy cases do men neglect improvement, even from these" the last resort (as we may say,) of the God of mercy for their conversion. They disregard the frowns, as they had before done the smiles of their heavenly Parent. Of those who are thus hardened to the various and repeated calls of his providence, most truly may it be said, the summer is past and they are not saved. It may indeed be said at the close of every day, and especially of every Lord's day, which we live without improvement. These are gracious summers; they are so many propitious seasons for labouring in the Lord's vineyard, and securing a harvest of life and glory. Every Sunday evening, may unrepenting sinners adopt the language of desponding Israel; "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." An opportunity has been given us of regarding the things of another world; but our thoughts, our treasures, our hearts, are still in this. Salvation has been freely offered us, and yet we are not saved. Most solemnly have we been admonished to repent and turn to God, and yet we live in our sins, and are without God in the world. Such a season is this present day, whose blessed light we now behold; and God only knows who, and how many, at the close of it, will have occasion to take up the same lamentation.

Times of particular awakening, are seasons of grace too often lost. There are, with almost every one, periods in the course of life, when the mind is impressed with serious thoughts of sin, and death, and judgment; when conscience is stung with remorse,

and the heart is awakened to righteousness. Who has not seen the time when the terrors of the Lord roused up the soul from its sleep; when it appeared to be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; when the soul seemed too precious to be lost; the Lord's mercies too great to be despised; when heaven appeared more valuable than the earth, and eternity longer than time! These are seasons when God's Spirit is striving with us; seasons favourable for sowing the seeds of grace, and if faithfully used, God would multiply the blessing; "to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; and from him that hath not (any increase of these talents,) is taken away that he hath." And this last, most unhappily, is the case of very many. These seasons of grace likewise, propitious as they are, thousands suffer to pass away with no permanent improvement.

And thus do we see, how applicable to the present state of religion, is the first part of our text.

II. And the second, we shall find, is equally applicable to ourselves. Here the prophet, in strong figurative language, bewails the wretched state of those who have thus neglected their seasons of mercy and grace. "For the hurt of the daughter of my people, am I hurt." He deeply sympathizes in their miseries. "I am black," (he adds,) "astonishment hath taken hold upon me." And in the next chapter, he continues the lamentation in still more pathetic strains: "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people."

Reason there must have been for such a lamentation. Extremely wretched, and most awfully distressing, must have been the state which could excite in the prophet's breast, such heartfelt commiseration.

And such it will certainly appear, if we view it in regard to those who have not profited by the means and opportunities of religious improvement.

For first, it is evident and certain, that the seasons which have thus been lost, can never be recovered. Time past never returns; and yet, obvious as it is, this is a truth, which, while time passes, men seem to forget. When we observe how many people spend their time, they seem to think that it has no value, or will have no end. When it is past, however, we better view its worth. Many upon their death-bed, and soon may we upon such a bed, deplore in vain the many hours spent in vanity. With agonizing remorse you may then look back on the days of youth, that favourable season, when you might have chosen a better part, which none could have taken from you; when God might have been your friend, and Christ your strength, and heaven your portion. Had you remembered your Creator then in the days of your youth, you would have escaped a thousand sins in the course of life, and found your hopes continually brightening as time advanced. Your language then would have been, "For me to live is Christ; to die in gain." With anguish unutterable, may we yet look back on seasons neglected, mercies abused, and dealings of providence sent to teach us wisdom, and sent in vain. God has often called us by his mercies, but we have not come; he has alarmed us by his judgments, but we have not learned to fear him.

His commands have been repeated, but we have not obeyed them. His sabbaths have passed over us, and we have made no improvement. Ordinances and means, and opportunities unnumbered, have graciously been vouchsafed, but every one is lost. Not a week, not a day, not an hour, can be recalled.

Nor is it sure that these favours will ever be renewed. Perhaps the seasons which are lost, are all that divine wisdom will see fitting to give us. Another harvest, another such summer, may not return. We incline, especially when in health, to promise ourselves many years, and seasons, and opportunities yet to come; and blessings which have long been enjoyed, we very naturally suppose will still be continued. In religion especially, where we ought to be most apprehensive, we are most secure. People generally think there will be hereafter time enough to prepare for heaven. But the event commonly shows the extreme folly of postponing to the last part of life, what should occupy the first. At every age, and every hour, we are subject to death, which is an entire termination of our spiritual summer, and of every season of grace. And though our life for many years should be prolonged, those gracious times of refreshing from on high may not return. Such favourable opportunities of hearing the word of God, of acquiring religious knowledge, and profiting by the means of grace, may never again be our portion. All especial strivings of the divine Spirit, may henceforth be discontinued. Of us may God say, as he once did of Ephraim, "He has joined himself to idols; let him alone." "Let him henceforth go on his own way. Afflictions and judgments, and all ye

gracious corrections of a merciful providence, let him alone. Ministers of the gospel, ye messengers of peace and salvation, cease to cast your pearls before swine. Let conscience never again awaken him to repentance, nor disturb his repose.

Under this head we should also consider, that neglecting to make improvement in seasons of grace, is itself a grievous sin, and very offensive to God. It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for those cities and towns and other places which have been blessed with the light of truth and the means of grace, without profiting by them. The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment, and condemn thousands of impenitent souls who live amidst the ministrations of the gospel in Christian lands. We have reason to believe that there is nothing which more provokes the indignation of heaven, than despising the means of grace, and resisting the striving of God's Spirit. This seems to be that sin against the Holy Ghost which shall not be forgiven. To this has the apostle reference when he says, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" What excuse can we render who have buried not only one but ten talents in the earth? Who are hardened against the mercies, and judgments, and long-suffering of God, and have done despite to the Spirit of grace?

To all these awakening considerations, we may add, that by refusing to profit by these dispensations of mercy, our hearts become more hardened. Every sermon you hear will do you good or hurt; be a savour of life or of death. There is no state of neutrality in religion; he who is not for the Saviour is

against him; ~~we shall~~ with him or we scatter abroad. Whilst under the discipline of the Almighty, we rise or fall, grow better or worse. If we stumble upon the Rock of our Salvation, we shall be broken; it is set for the fall, as well as for the rising again of many. Every Lord's day which passes, leaves some impression on the mind, of better or of worse. And the more you hear the gospel with unconcern, the less likely are you in future to be awakened when you hear it.

Who then can wonder that the holy inspired prophet is so deeply affected with the misery of this state? Extremely deplorable is indeed their situation, who have lost those blessed seasons which can never be recalled, and of which it is awfully doubtful whether they will ever be renewed; who, during the summer of salvation, when they might have been healed of their infirmities, have added sin to sin; who, instead of making their peace with God, have grieved his Spirit, wearied his patience, and provoked his indignation. Such people, (dreadful to utter,) have trodden under foot that blood of the new covenant, in which they should have washed away their sins; their hearts have been hardening like clay beneath the meridian Sun of Righteousness, which should, like wax, have melted into penitence and submission. It is a sight at which angels might weep. Did we rightly view its misery, we should wish that our head were water, and our eyes a fountain, to vent our grief and evince our repentance.

III. But is this state then entirely hopeless? "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician

there?" This is the third heart proposed for consideration, and no one of the three can be more interesting. For we may well fear, that this deplorable state is the condition of many, if not of all of us who are present. Which of us can say that we have not neglected many means and seasons and opportunities of religious improvement? Great then must be the comfort, and exceedingly interesting the assurance, that "God is merciful, slow to anger, of long-suffering, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil," even after it is denounced against the wicked. If we "will turn away from our wickedness which we have committed, and do that which is lawful and right, we shall save our soul alive." We have the comforting assurance, that there is balm in Gilead; there is mercy with God. "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father." "At what instant," (saith the Lord by this same prophet, eighteenth chapter,) "I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil, which I thought to do unto them." Yes, there is mercy with God which rejoiceth against judgment; there is a physician in Israel to dispense that mercy, to administer that balm of Gilead, that healing medicine to every penitent, humble, faithful soul. With regard to us who are here present, though the chief of sinners, we may humbly hope the case is not hopeless. Would the Lord bring us together in this his house and presence, if already he had cast us off? He does not yet let us alone; again does he speak to us in the language of mercy and

love ; he is still ~~feeding~~ ~~feeding~~ us by his word, and striving by his grace. Another season of his holy time he is adding to the number already given. The Saviour of the world is here again in the midst of a few assembled in his name. To those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, he is ready to minister that precious balm which alone can heal their sickness. Thanks be to God, that the battle, we may believe, is not yet lost; though foiled and often repulsed; though even retreating, we are yet in the field, and under that Captain of our Salvation, who is able and willing to conduct us to certain victory. However weary in the conflict, or heavy laden with a sense of guilt, come unto him, and he will give you rest. "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be like wool; though red like crimson, they shall be white as snow." "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

If it then be so; if the Lord be so merciful and long-suffering, why are we not saved? Why are we still in doubt, and sin, and unbelief? Why are we not rejoicing in hope? "Why then," (concludes the prophet,) "is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" This, brethren, is a close and heart-searching interrogation, from which especially, we should make the improvement of our subject. If the Lord does still continue to us the seasons of mercy and the day of salvation; if the medicine for a sinful soul be still prepared, and the physician ready to give it; if the arms of God's mercy be yet open to receive; the hand of Christ held out to lead, and his Spirit ready to strengthen us, what reason have we

to offer for not being saved? ~~Why are~~ not all Christians? Why does any one continue without hope, and without God in the world? The prophet had no occasion to answer this question. It is left to our own conscience; the reason is too obvious; the fault is wholly ours. "Ye will not," (saith Jesus,) "come to me, that I should give you life." On his part "all things are ready," but we refuse to come. We trust in Egypt; our hopes, our treasures, our hearts, are in the world. The love of the world, and its various amusements; an intemperate pursuit of its wealth and honours; a destructive fondness for a vain show; a routine of dissipation and scenes of pleasure; habits of levity, mirth and laughter; too much thought for the morrow, and anxious fears of want and suffering in the time to come; these are among the principal causes of the low state of religion, and of our profiting so little by our religious privileges. Hence it is, that our spiritual state, far from being as it should be, better, is, we may well fear, worse, more cold and dead, than it was the last year.

And are we content with this state of things? Do we intend thus to live, and thus to die? Does it awaken in us no solicitude or alarm, that while we are walking blindfold on the brink of the grave; while we know not but the next moment we may be called to the eternal world, we have no assurance that we shall be saved in Christ, or accepted of God? For such a condition of the daughter of God's people must not his prophet be hurt? While his labours are thus unfruitful, the blackness of discouragement will darken around the minister of Christ, and fill his soul with astonishment and grief.

Let Christians learn from our subject to trust less in the world, and more in God. Look no more back to Egypt, but rejoice that you are delivered from its bondage, and in the Lord's strength go on conquering and to conquer. While there yet remains so much land to be possessed ; so many evil desires and vicious habits to be subdued ; so many noble, godlike virtues to be attained, let us put on the whole armour of God, and by patient continuance in well doing, go on to perfection. This subject we ought to apply, each one, who knows the plague of his own heart, individually to his own case. The blindness of mankind, or their disregard of their immortal destinies, is a strange infatuation. The children of this world in their generation, even the birds of the air, are wiser than men in their religious concerns. "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times ; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming, but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." All the unnumbered mercies which we daily enjoy ; our bibles and our Sabbaths, our sacraments and sermons, without a due improvement, will but add to our condemnation. Our boasted privileges of light and liberty, do but increase our guilt and shame, if we walk still in the darkness of sin, and are slaves to evil passions. Every additional mercy which flows from the fountain of divine goodness, leaves the sinner without excuse.

God forbid that we should be left without hope ; God forbid that this blessed season of grace should with any of us be also lost. While balm remains in Gilead ; while the "fountain for sin and uncleanness," remains open ; while the Lord, with patient

goodness, is still stretching forth his hand to a disobedient and gainsaying people, let us not despair of salvation; but rather repair without delay, to the physician of our souls, that our health may be speedily recovered. And to the God of our salvation; to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be rendered eternal praise.

SERMON XXVI.



ON THE WORTH OF THE SOUL.

Matt. xvi. 26.

What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

IN discoursing on a subject so common, and so familiar to a Christian congregation as these words propose, novelty will not be expected. To awaken your serious attention to truths which it equally concerns all men deeply to consider, is what in the present discourse will be, the Lord permitting, attempted, and we hope, through his blessing, that it is all which on the preacher's part will be necessary.

That we, respected friends and brethren, during our short continuance in this mortal state, have a soul to dispose of; that our immortal destiny depends on our choice and conduct in this present world, is a consideration in itself, sufficient to awaken in every reflecting mind the utmost solicitude, and the deepest concern. Our Lord having put such a question as this now before us, had no occasion to give the answer; it is very evident that no price of equal value

can be received in exchange for the soul ; that our immortal welfare in that state of being to which we are so rapidly advancing ; that our eternal salvation in Jesus Christ, is incomparably more estimable and precious, than all the wealth, and joys, and hopes of this present state. Our bodies are mortal, and will return soon to the dust of which they were made, but the spirit of man ascendeth upward ; it is from that God who hath immortality, and though heaven and earth pass away, it shall not cease to be.

But how or where shall it be ? In what state of bliss or wo shall its immortal destiny be fixed ? What good is to be expected here ? What pleasure is attainable in this present life, worthy to be compared with that endless bliss promised to the faithful in Jesus Christ ? This is our present subject.

We might show that the pleasures of sin are of little real value ; that the way of transgressors is hard ; that there is no peace to the wicked ; that all the enjoyments to be expected from a vicious life, are more than balanced by attendant evils ; that the ways of God, to those who delight in them, are ways of pleasantness, and that the paths of pure and undefiled religion, are paths of peace. They who love God and keep his commandments, shall want no manner of thing that is truly good, and will promote their best interest. But at present, we will pass over these considerations, and meet the worldly man upon his own ground ; we will allow the pleasures of sin to be what and all that its most ardent votaries may conceive. Our Lord, to show their folly, has put the case most strongly in their favour ; he supposes the worldling to have attained the utmost of

his desires, even to have gained the whole world. And then demands what he is profited, if he has no hope beyond this world? If after his pleasing dream in a few short years has passed away, he must awake in hopeless misery!

Let us then attend to this bargain which we are all now making. Consider, I beseech you, with that awakened concern which the subject demands, what is the utmost value of this present world; what, at the lowest estimate, is the worth of eternal beatitude; and what possible thing there is, which, without the greatest folly, you can give in exchange for your soul.

First, then, we have no intention to undervalue those earthly pleasures which men so eagerly pursue. Set your own valuation on all the things of time and sense; remove all bounds and obstacles to the full attainment of your utmost wishes. We will suppose, what never has been, nor will be realized, that you have gained the whole world; that there is nothing on this terraqueous globe, nothing of its lands, its tenements, its commerce, its wealth or power, which, according to human estimate of property, you may not call your own. And what then will be the amount of your gain? What the utmost value of your riches? The earth would then be no more fruitful, than if equally divided among its millions. It would yield no new production to gratify your taste, nor would its seasons be more propitious. The fish of the sea would still continue to glide through its mighty waters, and to take pastime therein. The waves thereof would rage and swell, however your life might be in jeopardy. The birds will wing their airy flight, regardless of him, who boasts of being

lord of the whole earth. Diseases, and pains, and death, will show no respect to your exalted station. Not all the streams which wind their course and water your domains, would cool your tongue in a burning fever; nor would the honours and titles which should dignify your character, and adorn your name, give any ease or relaxation to bodily pains. Very few of the evils of life would be averted or made less by the increase of our possessions. Our friends would not be more sincere, nor our life prolonged, nor its troubles lightened. The fears and cares, and sorrows of the rich, are probably as many and great as those which are felt by the poor and humble. People of moderate fortune and less ambition, enjoy more tranquillity and peace. In proportion as a man is exalted above his fellows, he becomes the object of their envy, and his fears and perils are multiplied. Short was the career of that Grecian conqueror who is called the Great. Scarcely had Cæsar attained the perilous height of his ambitious projects, when the sword of Brutus reached his heart. And what was the end of that man whose splendid victories so lately dazzled the world, and threatened to subdue it? Man abideth not in honour; in his proudest state he walketh in a vain show. Many who have reached the envied summit of earthly glory, have ardently wished for retirement and ease.

That man most truly possesses the world who enjoys the most of it, or who renders it most subservient to his real happiness and best good. Hence does our Saviour Christ declare, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Their enjoyments are more pure; have less alloy of disap-

pointment and painful care. Gaining the world does not enlarge our powers, nor augment our capacity of enjoyment. On the rich man the sun shines with no brighter, nor the moon with milder rays, than on the meanest slave. To the poor are the dews as soft, the flowers as fragrant, and the rains as refreshing, as to the opulent and great. The shining vestments which decorate our persons; the splendour of our equipage; the ornaments of our habitations, are beauties which can but gratify the eye, and all who behold may equally enjoy them; and our display of them is from the vanity of convincing others that we are happy. We may add too, that our possessing the whole world, or any large part of it, is in a great degree but imaginary. It is but a little of its treasures which, however we may waste, that we can really use; but a little of its fruits and abundance that an individual can truly enjoy. Of all the productions of the earth, we can but take for food that which nature needs; if we take more, we are less happy. The humblest Christian can eat and digest as much food, and with as good relish, as the proudest monarch. In the peasant's cottage the air is as pure, and sleep as sweet, as in a palace. "When goods increase," saith Solomon, "what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." Indeed it would not require the wisdom of Solomon to show that all inordinate desires, however indulged, diminish, rather than add to the happiness of the

present life. They are happiest who use moderation, and "are temperate in all things."

But though God has set bounds to human ambition, as he has to the waves of the sea, and avarice can retain but little in its eager grasp, it is still awfully true, that men may, by their attempting to gain the world, lose their souls. By forgetfulness of God, and despising his mercies, while they pursue and idolize the world, they forfeit their hopes of life immortal. Where your heart is, will be your treasures. Small and wretched may be the portion of temporal good, which, after a whole life of anxiety and toil, you actually obtain. However inordinate is your love of riches, and though you devote your hours and days and years to the mammon of unrighteousness, you may still end your painful life in poverty. You may adopt the libertine's maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." You may devote your time, and the energies of your body and mind, to sensual pleasures, and find in consequence, your health destroyed, and your pains increased; yet the bargain is made; your soul is disposed of: you have chosen this world for your portion, and have relinquished all interest, and all hopes in Jesus Christ. What the most prosperous gain, compared with the whole world, is but very little; and the gain of very many is much less. Esau had but one meal in exchange for his birthright. Judas Iscariot, for his hopes in Christ, had but thirty pieces of silver, one single handful of glittering trash; and even this little he was soon, like many others, constrained to throw down, with bitterness and sorrow. And many, very many there are,

who sell their souls at as low a rate. Their sinful courses make them unhappy in this present life; their unrestrained desires increase with indulgence, and their painful pursuit of pleasure ends in despair.

In estimating what men obtain in exchange for their souls, much might be said, and ought to be considered of the shortness of life; the uncertainty of all earthly enjoyments, and the many evils to which men, in their best estate, and most prosperous circumstances, are exposed. But what has been said, is more than sufficient to evince that not only what you will probably obtain, but the utmost you can with any reason expect or look for in a sinful life, is very little; and that little very doubtful.

Let us then proceed to consider the worth of the soul, and what it is which the sinner gives for his worldly hopes and pleasures. And here we have no need to magnify or exaggerate; the hopes of heaven and immortal blessedness, infinitely surpass all that man can hope for in this present world. The soul is that part of our nature which was made in the image of God; it comprises all intelligence and rationality; it is what ennobles man above all other beings of this earth, and ranks him a little and but a little lower than the angels. Without the soul, man would rank below many of the brute creation. Men may kill the body, but to destroy this spiritual part of his nature, is what God alone can do. The soul is endued with immortality; its powers are not subject to decay. Though worlds should be dissolved, and heaven and earth should pass away, still will the soul exist, and its faculties perhaps increase; through eternity it will continue in happiness or in

wo. If the former shall be its blessed portion; if after the termination of this short life, your immortal spirit shall be received into the blessed mansions of heaven and dwell with Christ for ever, you will save your soul alive. But if you choose in this world to have your good things; if you neglect that great salvation which the God of mercy has provided, your soul will be lost; it will be hopelessly wretched in its future state. And this is indeed a dreadful perdition! The language used by the inspired writers, to express the misery of souls condemned; such as the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever; the lake of fire never quenched, and the worm that never dies, though it is figurative, is intended certainly to convey to our minds terrific apprehensions of its wretchedness and despair. The joys of heaven, on the contrary, are represented as exceeding every thing which language can express. Such is the unspeakable worth of the soul; it is capable of enjoying, and through the merits of Christ, and the mercy of God, it may enjoy immortal blessedness, and partake of the felicity of heaven. To miss of that felicity, and sink into hopeless perdition, is indeed to lose the soul. Any compensation of worldly wealth or honours, and all that we can hope for here, is scarce worthy of consideration; the soul is lost.

But though these things are taught of God and cannot be denied, men are slow of heart to receive them. Sin blinds the eyes and perverts the judgment. Many and great are the temptations to evil. A corrupt heart loves the wages of unrighteousness; our affections are strongly drawn to the world, and we naturally forget the soul, both its worth and its

welfare. By raising our view to higher beings, we may better see its value. Behold the angels of heaven; those pure intelligences who have not, like men, their "understandings darkened," nor are they like us, "alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." They view all things as they truly are; and how do they view, how do they estimate the worth of the soul? We may well judge from the readiness and pleasure with which they minister to its salvation. They dwell around those who fear God, and deliver them from their spiritual foes. As the messengers of God, they fly on the wings of love to promote the work of redemption. With what delight did one of them proclaim to the shepherds of Judea the joyful tidings of the Saviour's birth! And suddenly there was with that angel a multitude, and probably the whole multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and congratulating men. They are not interested in our salvation, except by the bonds of love; they are in dignity exalted to the third heaven, and dwell in the presence of God, and in the realms of bliss; and yet they take a deep interest in the state and destiny of every soul; they know its inestimable worth; they weep over its follies; they tremble at its perils, and they rejoice with great gladness when it is rescued from perdition. Yes, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." No sooner was the soul of that despised beggar, Lazarus, released from its diseased and mortal body, than the angels carried it to Abraham's bosom; to the mansions of beatitude prepared by the Saviour for the Israel of God. And

what is their employment in their celestial habitations? They cease not day and night to celebrate the deliverance of souls from sin and death; of all the themes which fill the universe with the praise of God, they prefer to sing the new song of Moses and the Lamb; the triumphs of the Redeemer; the love and mercy of God displayed in the salvation of mankind. How precious then must be the soul! Its deliverance from perdition is the favourite song of the angelic host! If you lose your soul, you lose a treasure which angels and archangels are never weary of extolling; a treasure so infinitely valuable, that to Christ who gives it, shall be ascribed eternal praise!

And we have to the same purpose testimony higher than angels, or any created beings; we have the testimony of God their Creator. For what is the subject of his word; what the end and purpose of his miraculous providence? For what did he at sundry times, and in such divers manners speak to our fathers by his prophets, and in later times by his Son, but to save our souls from being lost; to rescue the immortal part of man from endless misery? For this did he lay aside the terrors of divine justice, and meet the first guilty pair in their lost paradise, with the consoling promise of an Omnipotent Redeemer. For this were a few saved in the ark, from the general deluge. For this was Abraham called to leave his country, and his posterity, separated from an idolatrous world. For this, to carry on the great work of our salvation, his descendants were rescued from bondage, and conducted by the mighty hand of God, to the land of Canaan. And the subsequent wonders which time would fail to tell of, have their

source in the benevolence of the deity in saving the souls of men. Look at that greatest of all wonders, that most astonishing of all miracles, the incarnation and advent of Jesus Christ. Why did God send his Son into the world and bestow on the least deserving of all his creatures, this unspeakable gift? And why did the Son, by whom all things were made; who was seated above all thrones and dominions, leave the bosom of his Father, take upon him (not the nature of angels, which, if he had taken it, would have been a wonderful condescension, but) the seed of Abraham; even this our corrupt nature? Why did he endure for thirty years, the contradiction of sinners, and submit to be scourged and crucified and slain? Why was the grave opened, death conquered, and captivity led captive? It was because, in the view of a benevolent, wise, and merciful God, the soul is of great value, and he was not willing that it should be lost. Can you then think lightly of a soul for which such a price was paid? "Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold." Such trifles could avail nothing in ransoming a sinner. Lay the whole world in a scale against one soul, and the whole world would appear lighter than vanity. Your soul was redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ." No other sacrifice than the Lamb of God, the eternal Word made flesh, could take away the sins of the world. To effect this wondrous deliverance, and that a sinner may be just with God, he did a new thing, and a greater thing than the first creation; he gave a Saviour, who is both "the root and the offspring of David;" who was the Creator of the world, and yet

made of a woman. He who was in the form of God, enthroned in heaven, and at whose feet archangels cast their crowns, on the earth was of no reputation; was numbered with transgressors, and suffered as a malefactor.

Surely then your soul is a pearl of great price, and above all estimations; and it cannot be bartered away without the greatest folly. You can receive no return which is worthy of a comparison. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Or what man will by a sinful, careless life, despise that treasure, for which the God of mercy has this gracious concern? Shall we trifle away in fleeting vanities that inestimable birthright which was purchased at the immense price of a Saviour's blood? Though we were to obtain the whole world, how foolish would be the exchange! Consider then for how small a part of the world, and indeed for the very worst part, they who are living in their sins, give up their hopes of immortality! We hope and we pray God, that of those who are here present, none are of this description; but supposing that such were here, reflect, I entreat you, for what worthless toys you may be consigning your immortal spirit to irretrievable perdition. God gave his own Son to purchase your soul; and for what price do you sell it? Perhaps for the pleasure of swearing; for the satisfaction of using vile and wicked language; of profaning that sacred name, at which angels bow the knee; of deriding those mercies, for which the whole host of cherubim and seraphim are at this blessed moment praising God! Or it may be that intemperate drinking, that the sweet comforts and the pleasant fruits of intoxi-

cation, are the noble price which you obtain in exchange for immortal blessedness! And some too there are, who think that the pleasures of slander, of debauchery, or other dissipation, are better than all the promises of God in Jesus Christ.

These are samples of what men get for the loss of their souls; and are any here willing to make the exchange? For this mean mess of pottage are you willing to alienate for ever your heavenly birthright? Magnify as you will the pleasures of the world; suppose the joys of sin to be more and greater than mortal man has ever yet enjoyed; and view through a microscope your scanty span of life; and for all this, little and mean at best, are you content to be for ever wretched? Suppose, (as sinners view it,) that the practice of religion is painful, and its ways unpleasant; is it as painful as "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire?" Or which of your favourite amusements will you compare with the joys of heaven, and willingly receive in exchange for endless beatitude?

How dreadful then is the reflection, that millions of our fellow mortals are, as we must believe, at this time making this foolish exchange! Is not this a strange infatuation? If the Lord, to correct our faults, or to exercise our faith and patience, takes from us, but for a short time, some few of his many blessings; if one season is less propitious, and the earth less fruitful; if our friends forsake us, or our business is unsuccessful, we incline much to murmur and to feel impatient. Are we prepared then, and are we able to bear the loss of every blessing and every hope? If we cannot bear the frowns of his

divine justice condemns. Of all doctrines, it is in its effects the most salutary and excellent. Its powerful tendency is to reclaim men from all manner of evil, to produce amendment and holiness of life; to make men better and happier in this world, and to prepare them for a blessed immortality. It is a doctrine perfectly pure, allowing no manner of indulgence to sin; revealing the wrath of God against all unrighteousness, and all ungodliness of men. And yet, it offers pardon and justification so free and gratuitous, that the vilest sinner is not excluded, except by his own obstinacy. God's mercy is such, that it produces a holy fear; his goodness and long-suffering are calculated to lead men to repentance. Mercy in men, though it is amiable and godlike, and much to be commended, may (such is our imperfection, that it may) lessen our authority and encourage others in evil. Were you to overlook the faults of your children, and freely forgive them, as oft as they behave ill, it would be likely to ruin them. But such is divine wisdom, such are the perfections of God, so wonderful is the scheme of redemption, preached in his gospel, that his mercy produces holiness; it engages men in his fear and service; it is the only doctrine which ever has reformed, or can reform mankind. God's mercy perfectly accords with his truth, and while it gives peace, it promotes righteousness.

In the text now before us, the blessedness of repentance, God's merciful goodness, and his willingness to receive a humble, contrite heart, are most wonderfully exemplified. Who has ever sinned against God and abused his patience, more than Ahab, king

of Israel? The monarchs who reigned over the ten revolted tribes, were generally remarkable for nothing more than for their wickedness; but even among the wicked, Ahab had a detestable pre-eminence. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord," says the sacred historian, "above all that were before him: there was none like unto him, for setting himself to work wickedness; he did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel preceding." And yet this monster of wickedness is not excluded from mercy; even this wicked Ahab was rewarded for his penitence and humiliation before God. Contemplate, Christian brethren, the vile character of this impious monarch; his idolatries; his blasphemies; his contempt of God and religion, and his causing the whole nation of Israel to sin. Yet when this man is awakened to a humble sense of his guilt, falls prostrate before his offended Maker, divine wrath is softened to pity; the Lord lays aside his terror, and gives a respite to the royal penitent. No sooner was Ahab exalted to the throne of Israel, than he departed from God, and engaged in the grossest idolatry. In violation also of God's express command, he married Jezebel, a heathen princess, whose conduct was wicked, and her character proverbially vile and infamous. Many evils have been the unhappy consequence of imprudent matrimonial connexions. By such imprudence did Samson in early life lay the foundation of all his subsequent miseries. Much of Ahab's wicked conduct was owing to the ascendancy and influence of that woman. The prophet Elijah was sent to admonish him, but was persecuted. But the Lord's word was verified; the

severe famine which the prophet foretold, fell upon the sinful nation, and the king and his subjects were reduced to great distress.

And now at least, under the rod of affliction, we might expect that the king and the people would return to God. But the heart which is under the blindness and dominion of idolatry and sin, is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Far from confessing his own sins, Ahab accuses the prophet of being the author of the calamities which had fallen upon the nation, and furiously pursues him to take away his life. But after a while, Ahab's vengeance is diverted from pursuing Elijah by the predominance of another inordinate passion. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." They who become slaves to their passions, labour in the most wretched bondage. The possession of half the world could yield Haman no happiness or peace, while Mordecai the Jew, sat at the king's gate. Ahab sitting upon the throne of Israel, with the wealth of a nation at his command, beheld with a covetous eye his neighbour's vineyard; he desired it as a garden to the palace where Jezebel resided. Naboth, who owned the vineyard, esteemed it very highly, because it was an inheritance from his ancestors, and he conceived that the alienation of it from the family, would be dishonourable and injurious to his successors. "And Ahab came to his house heavy and displeased, because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; because he had said I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife, (who

was more abandoned to wickedness,) came to him, and said unto him, why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread?" When he had told her the mighty cause of all this sorrow and despair, she reproached him for his want of spirit, and for his tameness; "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" Do you pretend to be a king and suffer yourself to be denied so small a favour? "Arise," she says, "and eat, and let thine heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." She did so, and in a manner very consistent with her character; she caused Naboth to be falsely accused of treason and blasphemy, and to be put to death; and bid the king, without scruple or delay, to take possession of his vineyard.

Ahab obeyed, with a heart no doubt exulting, regardless of that all-seeing eye, which pervades the universe; that Almighty arm which wields the sword of eternal justice. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." "The word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel; behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he has gone to possess it." And soon did the impious monarch hear his tremendous doom; "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab (stung with remorse, and trembling with apprehension,) said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" The slaves of ambition and covetousness, consider all as enemies who oppose their wicked ways. Had Ahab known his enemy; had he known himself, the prophet's visit would have

been unnecessary. He now found, that however thoughtless and wicked men may live, "the day of the Lord will come." He hears from the lips of the prophet, the judgments and destruction which, for his wickedness, were determined upon his house. Of Jezebel it was also foretold, that she should be eaten of dogs by the wall of Jezreel. And to show the justice of these denunciations, it is here again remarked, that "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel."

But the word of the Lord is sharper than a two-edged sword, and is able to pierce the hardest heart. "And it came to pass when Ahab heard these words (of Elijah declaring the judgment of God against him,) that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly;" that is, barefoot, as mourners were accustomed to do.

We have little reason to hope, (what is not however for us to judge,) that this humiliation of Ahab was according to true godliness. Though conscience smote, and fears alarmed him, producing a temporary submission, we may well, from his subsequent conduct, fear that this was not a permanent conversion; it was not that repentance which is not to be repented of; it was the seed on stony ground which produced no lasting reformation.

- But his penitence was no doubt sincere; for a time he was sensible of his guilt, and earnestly be-

sought God to turn from him the evil which most justly he had deserved. What he did, and what the Lord did, is worthy of our consideration. You have seen the wickedness of king Ahab; behold now the mercy of the King of heaven. The word of the Lord came unto Elijah, saying, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." In regard to his humiliation, as a reward of his penitence, though but temporary and imperfect, the judgment upon Ahab's house is delayed till after his own decease; it was afterwards inflicted in the days of his son Jehoram, a son who followed the wickedness of his father without any repentance, without even a temporary submission to God.

1. From this remarkable portion of sacred history, there are some inferences which are worthy of our attentive regard. And among the first and most obvious, we are taught that there is a blessing attending the good conduct of those who are generally wicked; they who turn to God sincerely, though it be but for a season, will find some blessing attending it; for it is evident that this suspension of the punishment during Ahab's own life, is a reward for his submission. "Because he humbleth himself," saith God, "I will not bring the evil in his days." His repentance, we may well suppose, was not unto life; he had not the faith which justifies; probably he sinned in his deepest humility; yet comparatively, to say the least, his conduct was now good; he felt that he was a sinner, and that God was just; he called for mercy

and no doubt made some resolutions of amendment. The example and the effects even of this temporary compunction, were good ; it was better for the world, and perhaps for himself, that he should be humbled for a season than not at all. And his case may, I think, be justly applied to thousands of men whose general conduct is wicked and irreligious, but who sometimes perform noble acts, and appear to be, at times, actuated by good principles. And it is according to the wisdom of God, and the ordinary course of his providence, to reward such virtue with temporary blessings. Our Saviour said of hypocrites who do good deeds from worldly motives, “that they have their reward.” They made prayers, they gave alms, and did other good deeds to be seen of men, and to gain some worldly end ; and they did gain it ; they were respected as pious, charitable people, and they were honoured as benefactors. They who are industrious and economical, are usually blessed with a competency, and often with riches. They who labour for the public good, are much esteemed by the people. As riches and popularity are what such men seek for and most esteem, “verily they have their reward.” The good deeds of such men are not good in a religious sense ; and the rewards they receive, are not permanent. Their wealth, which moth and rust corrupts, is not the true riches. The bread given them, is not that which nourisheth to eternal life. God shows his justice and his goodness in measuring out his bounty to mankind according to their works, and the desire of their hearts. It was evidently through fear of temporal judgments, that Ahab so humbled himself ; and the Lord rewarded

him, by removing the judgments farther from him. But probably he did not seek for a new heart and a new spirit. To obtain pardon and reconciliation; to become a faithful servant of God, and obtain eternal life, was not, we may fear, his object. We do not know that he even restored the vineyard which he had so wickedly seized. Many there are, who on a sick bed are much alarmed by the peril of their situation, and very humbly, and very earnestly, beseech God to restore them to health; if their chief desire is to live longer in this world, this only is what God gives them; he removes the plague, but their hearts are hardened. He gives them what they desire, but he does not give them what they should have sought for, the "one thing needful;" they are restored to natural strength, but spiritually they have no health in them.

2. In this case of Ahab, we have also an affecting proof that God is merciful. Even when he threatens to visit with judgment, there is an implied condition that if we repent and turn to him, he will receive and forgive us. An instance of this and most wonderful, we have recorded in the book of Jonah. "Yet forty days," said the Lord, by the mouth of that prophet, "and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Short was the period fixed on; tremendous was the judgment revealed; positive was the denunciation, and its accomplishment seemed determined. But the people of Nineveh believed God, and they feared him; they fasted with great humility and earnest supplication. The king left his throne; he divested himself of the ensigns of royalty, and sat with his people in sackcloth. And he exhorts them to pray

with the most earnest supplication. "Cry mightily unto God; let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands;" let them bring forth fruits meet for repentance, for "who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not." Certainly none can truly tell that God will not be merciful. None, however wicked, who are sincerely disposed to turn to God, need ever despair. The God who spared the Ninevites, and hearkened to the prayers of Ahab, will give rest to all who are weary and heavy laden. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his ways and live." The arms of his mercy are ever opened to receive a returning penitent. To magnify his mercy; to encourage sinners of every name and description to fly unto him for refuge, he will, as we have seen, bestow temporary blessings on the good conduct of those who are in other things wicked.

This doctrine is indeed glorious to God in the highest, and to men it is exceedingly consolatory. But it is a doctrine which men often and very much abuse, even, we may well fear, to their own destruction. Because God is merciful, some seem to forget that he is righteous; because he is ready to forgive, they suppose he will never punish; because he bestows temporal blessings, men are ready to conclude that he will certainly add those which are eternal. A slight repentance, a temporary humiliation, men think, will satisfy a God so inclined to be gracious; and be sufficient to secure eternal life. The improvement we ought to make, is to return with sincere

penitence and humiliation to a God so good and merciful. Convictions of sin we should view as operations of his grace. "He never exhibits a more solid testimony of his love to us, than by awakening in our soul a sense of guilt; and never probably do we more offend him," than when we receive this grace in vain; when we oppose this conviction, and strive against the Spirit. Let us not deceive ourselves by a superficial repentance, or a transient humiliation. Let us not only fear the judgment, but restore the vineyard; break off from our sins; with true devotion return to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. A temporary reformation, though God may reward it, is not to be relied on. Ahab humbled himself for a season; the wicked Pharaoh seemed many times to be penitent and submissive; even Herod heard John gladly, and did many good things in consequence. But such partial and temporary reformation, is not sufficient; the Lord requires of us a general conformity of our heart and life to his word and will, and a persevering continuance in well doing.

3. There is another point connected with this subject, which should make a part of our improvement; as the good deeds of worldly men have a temporary reward, so will the evil conduct of good men be corrected by some manner of punishment in this present world. If Christians walk unworthy of their vocation; if the mercies of God and a sense of his goodness will not engage their hearts to love and serve him entirely, he will use the rod of affliction; he will chastise them with pains, or sorrows, or disappointments. And a great mercy it is that he will

do this; that his backsliding people will not be given over unto death. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “when we are judged, (when Christians for their faults suffer affliction,) we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” The Lord is good in all his dealings; his blessings are sent to encourage us in well doing; and correction is used to reclaim us from evil. It is enough certainly, that we can obtain a well grounded hope of a blessed immortality. This hope is much strengthened by the subject which has now engaged our attention. If the Lord will bless in this life those who do well; if a temporary penitence will turn from us evils which most justly we have deserved, much more will the Lord fulfil his promise to those who sorrow after a godly sort; those who truly turn to him, will he save with an everlasting salvation. The remains of sin which continue in the renewed heart, he may remove by afflictions, while the punishment of the hardened sinner will be reserved to a future state. Here the wicked may receive good things of a temporal nature, and the Christian evil things; but in the life to come the faithful will be comforted, and the ungodly tormented. When king David was convicted of his sin, and humbly acknowledged his transgressions, his pardon was declared, “the Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” He was restored to God’s favour; but the honour of God, and the good of religion, required that he should in this world be chastised. As he had “slain Uriah with the sword,” it was declared that the “sword should never depart from his house.” As he had unlawfully taken another man’s wife, his wives should be taken

from him, and "evil be raised up from his own house." And because he had "given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," it was also declared, that the child which, with the fondest affection, he loved, "should surely die." David thought as he ought, that it was great mercy in God that on these terms he might be accepted, and not "suffer the vengeance of eternal fire." When we are wounded it is happy if we may obtain a cure; the pain of the operation must be endured. God's wisdom and truth will often require that our sins be punished in this world; but it is the only punishment which the truly penitent and faithful have to fear.

4. We learn also from our subject, and from all the scriptures, that our wicked conduct may bring evil upon our children and other descendants, even "to the third and fourth generation." Thus the judgment denounced for Ahab's wicked reign, fell upon his house in his son's days. The sins of the fathers, as we learn in the second commandment, "are visited upon the children," if, as they very naturally will do, the children follow the father's sins. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." The son who does not hate God "shall not bear the iniquities of the father." But when parents do evil, their children are more likely to be wicked, and they are punished for following their father's evil ways. Ahab's house, his wife and children, were very wicked; God displayed his mercy, and encourages all men every where to repent, in not bringing the evil upon his house in Ahab's day; and he was wise and just in bringing the evil upon his house in his son's days.

To conclude then: while we adore the mercy of God, who is more ready to forgive than we to repent, let us not vainly hope while we live in sin, to escape his judgment. If you wilfully sin against God, one at least of three things must inevitably be the consequence. You must sincerely repent, or you will be afflicted in this world; or (which is infinitely the most to be feared,) your soul will perish. And let it not be forgotten, that by ungodly living, we may bring evil upon those we love and leave behind us. Let us be anxious not merely to educate our children and leave them good possessions, but especially to leave them free from the guilt of our sins. Should you repent, and through God's mercy be forgiven, your family, your servants, your children, may follow you in sinning and not in repentance. You may not be able to rescue them from the contagion of your evil example. The compunction of your heart is not communicated to theirs. They may continue the avarice and impiety, or the luxury and dissipation in which they have been trained, long after repentance has changed your heart and its pulsation has ceased.

Like the psalmist then, let us be awfully afraid to transgress the commands of God; and like him, pray God to cleanse us from our secret faults, and to keep us from presumptuous sins, that our souls may be saved, our children blessed, and to God be rendered eternal praise.

SERMON XXVIII.



ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PASSIONS.

Esther v. 13.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew, sitting at the king's gate.

WERE it in the power of man to see his mind in a mirror, as he can his natural visage, he would not be much flattered, or entertained with the view. Few of us are sensible how much our hearts are depraved, and what absurd and evil passions we harbour in our breasts. And yet we are by no means destitute of such a mirror; God in his abundant goodness has furnished us with a faithful reflector; even his own word of truth, which is a searcher of the heart, and shows to us who rightly use it, what spirit we are of, and what is in us. “For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” There are, however, but few who faithfully use this mirror; many who are hearers, are not doers of the word. They are “like a man beholding his natural

face in a glass;" as in other respects, so unhappily in this, "they go their way, and straightway forget what manner of men they are."

In that portion of God's word, held up in the text for our present instruction, and the history with which it is connected, we may see, in a striking view, and we must be very blind if we do not see, the deformity of a proud, unhumiliated heart, and the pernicious consequence of indulging evil passions. The words you no doubt recollect, were spoken by Haman, the chief minister of Ahasuerus a Median emperor. He was a powerful monarch, whose dominions extended from India to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, which then comprehended the best, and indeed the greatest part of the known world. Among his vassals and subjects, were of course a vast number of tributary kings and princes; and over all of them he advanced his favourite Haman. No subject perhaps ever, in the history of the world, possessed such honours, dignity, and power. If the possessions of this world can give man contentment, and make him happy, this favourite of fortune, this idol of the world must, we should judge, have enjoyed the highest felicity. And yet, few men perhaps in the whole empire, were less happy than he. With all this abundance of wealth and honours; with half the world at his control, one little affront to his pride; one solitary refusal to offer incense to his aspiring vanity, was sufficient to inflame his resentment, and render him completely wretched.

Among the descendants of those whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried captive with Jeconiah to Babylon, was one Mordecai, a cousin to Esther the queen.

Esther, having no parents living, was brought up by Mordecai, and under God's providence, it was owing to his management and address that she was raised to the throne. His affection for his royal cousin, induced him to attend about the palace, and to sit much of the time at the king's gate, that he might be advised of her welfare, and give her such counsel as she might need. It was the custom of those eastern countries, to pay a sort of religious homage to their prince, and especially to bow or prostrate the body, as they passed by. The king had commanded that all his subjects should render this respect to his favourite Haman. But Mordecai, from religious scruples, or from some other motive, would not show him this high respect; accordingly "he bowed not, nor did him reverence."

When this came to the ears of Haman, and he had himself noticed the neglect, "he was full of wrath; and he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone." He despised a single victim; the blood of a nation was alone sufficient to satiate his vengeance, and to expiate the mighty wrong. "He sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom, even the people of Mordecai." According to the superstition of his country, he with his friends cast the lot to know what day would be most favourable, most acceptable to his idols, for executing this bloody purpose. And here the providence of the true God interfered in behalf of his people; the lots were so disposed, by him no doubt who governs all things, that, much to Haman's disappointment, the time for destroying the Jews was put off almost a whole year.

Haman having, as he supposed, discovered at what time he could most successfully accomplish his purpose, next obtained an edict, or command from the king, that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all the Jews, men, women and children, should be destroyed, and the spoil of all their property was to be given to Haman. To some it may seem scarcely credible, that Ahasuerus should yield so easily to this horrid measure of his wicked minister ; but they who are acquainted with the human heart, with the history of the world, and the cruel despotism of absolute monarchies, will not think it strange. History furnishes many instances of barbarous tyranny scarce less mad, or less wicked, than this decree of Ahasuerus. To those who desire to know the full extent of human depravity, and of what wickedness men unrestrained are capable, I would recommend to read the history of the Persian monarchs. Such a reader will feel grateful to a righteous providence, that according to the "sure word of prophecy," the Macedonian leopard was sent, in God's due time, on wings of vengeance, to devour them. It is a great consolation to believers, that a righteous God for ever reigns. To the wicked he prescribes bounds, as he does to the ocean. "Thus far shalt thou come, and here shall thy waves be stayed." In the event of this history is wonderfully seen the justice and wisdom of God's providence. The Jews besought God in fasting and prayer, and God heard their mourning; he delivered them from their adversaries. It was so ordered, that the king discovered the worthiness of Mordecai, the innocence of his nation, and Haman's wickedness. But the decree had gone forth that the

Jews should be destroyed. And there was a custom among the Medes and Persians, that what was once established by the king, should never be repealed. He could not revoke his edict for slaying the Jews; and to preserve them, he issued another decree, giving them authority to defend themselves against their enemies; and in consequence, they who had plotted their destruction, were eventually themselves destroyed. As the psalmist says, they fell into the pit which they digged for others. The whole of this history is highly instructive to those who delight in viewing the ways of God, and the equity of his government. How wonderful was that providence, which made Esther the instrument of preserving the Jews, Mordecai of saving the king's life, and in consequence his own, and which so ordered, that Haman was in the event hung upon the gallows which he had erected for an innocent man.

But our text directs our attention more particularly to the discontent and wretchedness of Haman, amidst all the profusion of wealth and honours which fortune and the king's favour had heaped upon him. "He called for his wife, and his friends, and told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him; and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

This is a picture, not of one man merely, but, in a great degree, of human nature. We may reasonably suppose that this man was the object of envy to the whole empire; those who beheld his greatness would naturally suppose him as happy as mortal can be; when, perhaps, there was scarce a peasant in the kingdom, who had less content and peace of mind. In vain was "the glory of his riches;" in vain were thousands and millions at his command; in vain did the earth pour its luxuriant abundance into his bosom. The queen extended to him the highest honours; the king continually bestowed upon him new favours and splendid gifts; but in all this profusion of blessings he found no enjoyment; happiness was far from him. There was one thing not according to his mind. "Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." One whom he hated was permitted to sit at the king's gate. This single affront to his unbounded pride, was sufficient to disturb his tranquillity, and to poison every enjoyment. Passion, malignant and unrestrained, like an envenomed canker, gnawed upon the vitals of his felicity.

If, however, this character were peculiar to Haman, it would be much less deserving of your attention; but this example is held up to the world to show, not so much what he was, as what we are. It is a faithful mirror, reflecting the deformity of our fallen nature, showing that the human mind is disordered, estranged from God, and the enemy of its own peace. It exhibits, in a very striking view, the evil effects of unrestrained passions, and will very naturally suggest to our consideration, some profitable reflections.

1. Let us learn from Haman's case, not to judge of the happiness of others from their circumstances. To call the proud and prosperous happy, is foolish as it is common. A man's enjoyment is seated in his mind; how then can you judge of it from his possessions? To envy a man's good fortune, is wicked; to suppose he must of course be happy, is weakness. You see indeed his goods and possessions, but not his heart. You know not what cares and vexations of spirit may be entailed upon his estate, nor what thorns are mingled with the flowers which strew his path; what mental agonies may sting his heart; what discontent may be rooted in his mind. Many an object of envy is among those most to be pitied. The psalmist acknowledges, that to see the prosperity of the wicked, once caused him for a short time almost to doubt the profitableness of godliness; but when, from better knowledge, he saw what was truly their state, it excited rather his commiseration; and he is then prepared to tell you, "grieve not thyself at him, whose way doth prosper." Solomon says, "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men; a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof; this is vanity, and an evil disease." And a greater than David or Solomon has told us, "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;" nor does his happiness necessarily depend on the prosperity of his circumstances.

2. Haman's example will teach us further, that true contentment and peace of mind are not of this world. It is a weakness common to men to form too high expectations of terrestrial felicity. The consequence is, they pursue it with too much eagerness, and by improper means ; and of course, they are impatient of disappointment, and enraged by opposition. If we expected less happiness in the world, we should find more : be content with little, and God will give you much. You should look for contentment in religion, rather than in the world, and more, much more, by restraining and correcting inordinate and sinful affections, than even by gratifying those which are reasonable. Why should we seek among external things for that which is to be found within? Contentment and peace arise from no given abundance ; from no degree of prosperity ; but from a right disposition of the mind. The art of happiness, if we may so speak, is not in adding to our possessions, but in a thankful enjoyment of what we have, and a patient, cheerful resignation to whatever is denied. This world has many comforts wisely suited to its state, but we are made chiefly for another world ; nor can we be truly happy, while our chief concern is confined to this. We were made in the image of God, and we are most happy when most like him. In vain do we attempt, by pursuing objects of time and sense, to gratify the cravings of our immortal nature. "God," saith the excellent Bishop Horne, "has made the soul of man for himself, and has bequeathed to it unhappiness till possessed of its Maker. Men are daily inventing new schemes to promote happiness, till diversion itself becomes a science diffi-

cult to learn, and amusement is a toil, wearisome to body and mind. All feel and all complain that something is wanting. And very true there is something wanting. Though they are troubled about many things, one thing is needful. The light of God's word, and the comforts of religion, are wanting. Like the poor prodigal son in the parable, they would fain fill their bellies with the husks which the swine do eat; they endeavour to nourish their immortal souls with the empty, unsatisfying things of this corruptible world, which were calculated for the bodily appetites only." These empty, fading things, can never, in their nature, give content and pure enjoyment to minds endued with the celestial principles of reason and moral sense; to minds capable of communing with God, and partaking of the joys of heaven and immortality.

And not only do men expect too much happiness from the world, but in the eagerness of the pursuit, they overlook and undervalue, and often frustrate those enjoyments which this life does afford. Inward peace is sacrificed to external appearance; solid comforts are exchanged for outward show. In many instances, we deprive ourselves of happiness, from the vanity of being thought happy. From this vanity chiefly do we strive for honours. From this chiefly is our display of wealth and grandeur, and all our exterior decorations. We display what the world supposes to be the evidence of happiness, that the world may believe that we possess the reality. And hence does the psalmist truly say, that "man walketh in a vain show:" hence the evil common to men, which the wise man saw under the sun. Hence among so

many blessings is so little enjoyment ; hence, if a man gain the world, it all avails him nothing ; he either weeps for the want of another world, or is vexed that a Mordecai sits in the gate.

3. But what is chiefly to be learned from the history of Haman, is the evil of indulging unreasonable, disorderly affections. The due government of our passions, as reason dictates, and the word of God requires, is among the most important and necessary of the works which our “hand findeth to do,” considering ourselves either as men or as Christians. As men, and without looking beyond this present life, it is necessary to our peace of mind, and to our usefulness in the world, that we should be temperate in all things. What tongue can number, or what language express, the miseries which spring from ungoverned passions? We have seen the wretchedness and ruin brought upon one by the indulgence of malignant pride. What did Haman want, and yet what did he enjoy? Who would desire his immense fortune and profusion of honours, with his bitterness of soul? Indeed, his honours and good fortune made him the more wretched. In some humble station of life, the neglect of Mordecai would have passed unnoticed. If king Ahab had been a private man, of moderate fortune, when Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard, he would not have “laid himself down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and refused to eat bread.” To weep for the want of a garden of herbs, a man must first be a king. To find no enjoyment in all that the earth can bestow, he must be raised above one hundred and twenty-seven princes. There are now in this world, thousands and tens of thousands, living in

vanity and suffering great vexation of spirit, who, if God had never given them more than one-tenth of what they possess, would have been comparatively happy. Our passions were given by the author of our beings, and for the wisest ends. They stand ever ready in their order to perform the offices allotted them in the economy of nature. Like that noble animal the horse, when well trained and well managed, they are exceedingly useful; but give them the reins, and with wild impetuosity they bear us to destruction. The votaries of avarice and ambition; they who seek for honours by means dishonourable, and all who are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, generally find, by dear-bought experience, that evil passions, and all inordinate desires, are not to be satiated with indulgence; sanctified and subjected to a conscientious regard to the word of God, they are virtuous, holy and useful; when selfish and indulged, they are vicious and destructive. When was covetousness ever satisfied with its acquisition? Success increases desires; the more it gains, the more it craves.

There are some "inordinate and sinful affections," which are punished in this present life. Thousands are discontented, they know not why, amidst an abundance of blessings. An intemperate craving for more, poisons the enjoyment of what we have. Like Tantalus in the fable, the ambitious are continually reaching at alluring objects, which almost continually elude their grasp. Like him, the envious enjoy not their own blessings, and are vexed and tormented with the prosperity of others. "We call the proud happy," but they are falsely so called. They never

receive all that deference and respect to which they think themselves entitled. Mortifying occurrences are frequently provoking their resentment, and embittering their enjoyments. How very much do the proud suffer, because they cannot make that vain show in the world, which they foolishly desire ; because others excel them in riches, or honours, or magnificence ; because all things are not according to their mind ! Those who think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, will of course never suppose that they have all that they deserve. God has appointed “a thorn in the flesh ;” he has placed a Mordecai at the gate, which reminds good men of their weakness, and makes them humble ; but it haunts the arrogant with unceasing vexations. It is a scourge attendant upon every unruly passion, disturbing our present peace, and frustrating our future hopes.

If then, you consider yourselves but as men, and without extending your view beyond the present life, you see how much it is your interest and your wisdom to restrain your passions ; to regulate your desires and affections by reason and religion ; and to learn with an apostle, “in whatever state you are, therewith to be content.” But how much more is this our wisdom and our duty considered as Christians ; considered as those to whom God in his mercy has revealed the truths of religion, and the hopes of heaven ; as those who profess to forsake the world and its sinful vanities, and to be the disciples of a meek and holy Saviour ! Us surely it becomes, and behoves us above all men, to be temperate, and to let our moderation be known in all things. We have

taken a view of one of those examples which the Lord, in mercy, holds up as a warning to the world. We have before us one of the ten thousand instances of those who are wretched amidst abundance, and drown themselves in those streams of God's bounty which he has given to refresh the earth. Who of you has not frequently observed the numberless, and many of them nameless miseries, which spring from disorderly passions? They frustrate our happiness here, and it is still more certain, for God has declared, that they unfit us for heaven, and future blessedness. Our natural affections are given us as helps in all the duties of life and religion. They are the wings of the soul by which we should soar above the earth, and hold our conversation in heaven. Disorderly passions are as limbs out of joint, which give both pain and irregularity to our motion; they most of all things hinder us in the race that is set before us. You are not to suppress, nor, were it possible, to extirpate your passions; you need them all, and should govern and direct them to their proper objects. Take care also, that you do not overrate your merits, nor think too highly of yourself. Be moderate in your desires, and content with such things as God gives: "Godliness with contentment is great gain." The contented are happy here, and they are hopeful candidates for immortal beatitude. Discontent in its nature, is opposition to God. It is virtually a disapprobation of his providence; a censure upon the distribution of his favours. Who that is discontented can truly love God, or feel grateful for his mercies? Can he who suffers his mind to be

rankled with pride, or malice, or envy, realize that the Lord is good; that his mercy endureth for ever?

Let us endeavour, according to our power, (and if we are willing, God will give us strength,) to bear with patience, fortitude, and Christian resignation, the real troubles and evils of life, well knowing that they are less than we deserve, and are not to be compared with those glories for which they are intended to prepare us.

But if we are bound, as we certainly are, by interest and duty, to be patient and resigned under real afflictions, how sinful and offensive must be the discontent which springs from imaginary evils! How unchristian, how ruinous to the soul, if not to the body, are those needless anxieties, those disordered passions, which arise from perverse humours, from sinful indulgence! Can we, Christian friends, on whom the Lord is daily bestowing such signal blessings, both temporal and spiritual, suffer our minds to be tormented with needless and imaginary troubles? God forbid that the good things which he so mercifully bestows, should avail us nothing, because every thing is not according to our mind. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Let us not go abroad for misery, while he has peace to give within. Think of what you have, rather than of what is denied; for what the Lord gives be duly thankful; if you have food and raiment, be therewith content. But if you abound, "be not high-minded, but fear;" for he "who makes you differ from another," "is no respecter of persons." That we may never forget nor abuse his mercies, the same Lord mercifully grant, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXIX.



ON THE CHARACTER OF DAVID.

Acts, xiii. 22.

I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

THESE words of St. Paul, addressed to the Jews of Antioch, refer to the testimony which the Lord gave to the character of David king of Israel. In several places of the holy scriptures do we find this monarch distinguished as a person eminently faithful and religious, and as being highly in favour with God. And yet it is seen in his history, as recorded in the same word of God, that he was far from being faultless; that he was guilty of some great sins.

There has been a double abuse made of this commendation of David's character, when compared with his moral conduct. On the one hand, unbelievers make this an objection to the scriptures, and of course to Christianity; that David, who was a wicked man, is praised as eminently good and perfect. And licentious people, on the other hand, who mock at sin, would justify their own wickedness by David's ex-

ample. If David, they argue, who was guilty of murder and adultery, and often cursed his enemies, was accounted a good man, and was accepted of God, what have I to fear, whose sins are no greater than his? Will God be less merciful to me than he was to David?

It is proposed, therefore, if the Lord permit, to examine these premises, from which infidelity and vice have drawn such pernicious inferences; to view first David's private character, and then examine more particularly in what sense it is said that he was a man after God's own heart.

I: It is very natural and not uncommon, for those who would discredit the holy scriptures, or excuse their own wickedness, to represent the character of this monarch in the most odious light, to hide his virtues, and magnify his faults. That David sinned, especially in the affair of Uriah, the scriptures teach. They teach too, what the wicked are not so ready to notice, that David suffered in this world great punishment in consequence of his sins. Because he killed Uriah with the sword, the sword, while he lived, did not depart from his house. And what David thought of himself as a sinner, and how he humbled himself before God, is seen in his penitential psalms.

And yet, were it necessary, we might apologize for his failings. There are some considerations, which, if they do not, and indeed nothing can wholly excuse his crimes, palliate, or at least account for them. Great allowance should be made for the customs, and morals, and spiritual ignorance of the times in which he lived. Mankind were not then so ci-

vilized, nor their manners so refined, nor the duties of life so well understood, as at the present time. The Jews indeed had divine revelation, but nothing like so clear and full as what we now enjoy. Their's was but the twilight of the gospel day; very imperfect was their knowledge of the renovating doctrines of Jesus Christ. And, as St. Paul tells the Athenians, "the times of that ignorance God winked at," and as Christ says, many things were "suffered for the hardness of their hearts," which God never approved, and which, if now done, would be exceedingly sinful. We should further consider what unlimited power was then, and in that country, is still supposed to appertain to kings. They were accustomed to view the world as made for their happiness, and other men to be their vassals. It was not possible for them to view as we do the liberty and rights of man. This is strikingly evident in the deep conviction and remorse of David, when, in Nathan's parable, he saw his guilt. What his feelings then were, we have expressed in the fifty-first Psalm. Who of us can say what abominations we should have committed, what absurdities we should have fallen into, had we lived three thousand years ago? It is of God's great mercy that we know the truth, and are freed from the bondage of sin and superstition which then enslaved the world.

We might say much too, of the uncommon trials to which David was called, beyond the experience of almost any other man. And also of his natural delicacy of feeling, and acuteness of sensibility, which, if it made him more ardent in his religious affections, rendered him also more vulnerable to the fiery shafts

of the wicked. He was like a vessel tossed upon a tempestuous sea ; though he was raised oft to the heavens, he was subject also to be plunged amidst the waves, where, as he says, the waters came over his soul. But in every storm he kept his true course ; his heart was ever right towards his God.

Among the objections to David's character, we often hear of his cruelty and his imprecations. But what proof have we that he was cruel ? Towards his enemies he was uncommonly merciful. What was his conduct towards Saul, his most dangerous and deadly foe, who sought his life through all the country ? Repeatedly did Saul fall into David's hands, who might have privately slain him, but though by his best friends urged to do it, and though he knew it would advance himself immediately to the throne, he refused to hurt him ; he chose to overcome evil with good. And when afterwards David was king, he did not manifest a vindictive spirit ; he did not punish those who had cruelly insulted and persecuted him in adversity ; he forgave those who had injured him, and punished those only who had been guilty of crimes against the state.

In the Psalms of David are many expressions in the form of curses or imprecations, but they are far, very far from being the language of private malevolence or resentment ; generally, they are solemn and prophetic denunciations of divine displeasure against the enemies of God, and the opposers of religion. In the New Testament we find many of them, by Christ and his apostles so applied. And as such do Christians still repeat them, not as wishing evil, or invoking judgment on any one ; but as acknowledging

the power and providence of God ; as praying that our spiritual enemies may be subdued, and that the Lord Omnipotent may rule in Zion, “ casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

David we know is, in common with the rest of his nation, accused of barbarity in destroying the nations of Canaan. And here too we might plead in his behalf the custom of the age in which he lived ; but here we need no such apology. Not only was it excusable in the Jews, but it was their indispensable duty to destroy those wicked nations. In those wars they were but the instruments of providence, the ministers of God, commissioned, and expressly commanded to execute the vengeance, not of man, but of the Almighty, upon an ungodly race. None surely will question, but God may destroy a people by war, or pestilence, or famine, or any other judgment, as seemeth to him good. When he pours out his judgments upon a guilty world, he is not restricted in the instruments of his holy warfare. In this case, as in many others, he did it by the sword, and with such circumstances attending, as to manifest his indignation against all ungodliness of men, and also his providence, his justice, and his sovereignty. He here teaches us, that God only has a right to take the life of man ; that we are strictly to obey his commands ; that no passions of our minds, or propensities of our nature, may turn us aside from the rule of his word. If duty to God require the sacrifice, we must not spare the children from pity ; nor the wealth from avarice ; nor the implements of war from ambition

or worldly policy. With undeviating fidelity we are to fear God, and to observe his precepts.

Most unreasonable, then, is the objection from the Israelites not sparing the innocent. Were they to be the judges who were innocent or who to be spared? The Israelites had no right to destroy any of those nations, nor to possess their land, but as God gave them commission : and his command was to destroy all. And this too was agreeable to God's dealing in other cases. When he destroys people and nations by other instruments, the helpless infant, the tender female, and the hardened sinner, perish indiscriminately. When floods of water overwhelmed the earth ; when fire fell on Sodom and Gomorrah ; or when, by any general judgment, he depopulates a nation, or lays a country waste, the cries of the innocent cannot avert the plague. The pestilence which walks in darkness, or the sickness which kills at noon-day, makes no distinction of age or sex. In such calamities the distress is general.

Let it also be kept in remembrance, that in regard to the divine government, there is no cruelty in the death of infants. It is appointed unto all men once to die ; and the pains of death are no greater in childhood. For aught we know, it is a mercy to take them when young from this evil world. In taking the righteous from the earth, the Lord is good ; for they are prepared for heaven : in destroying the wicked he is just ; for they are not fit to live. The destruction of the Canaanites will ever, while the world endures, remain a fearful admonition to wicked nations ; and the victories and conquests of Israel, while the gospel trumpet shall continue to sound, will

guide and animate the Christian warrior; will embolden us to put on and trust in the armour of God.

II. Much might justly be said of the excellence of David's moral character; but our subject leads us rather to the inquiry, in what sense it is said that he was a man after God's own heart? What is the perfection which is thus ascribed to this king of Israel? If we attend to the language of scripture, and God's purpose of election; if we rightly view the design of his providence in choosing the descendants of Abraham, and distinguishing them among the nations of the earth; it will be evident that our text has regard not so much to the private, as to the public character of David. The Israelites were chosen and separated from the world, that the knowledge and worship of the true God might be preserved in the earth, and the world be prepared for the advent of Christ, and the preaching of his gospel. For this wise and gracious purpose was the law given by Moses to the chosen race; their observance of it was an evidence of their faith, and of their acceptance with God. And it was made the principal duty of their kings and other rulers, to enforce the observance of the law, and to preserve the people from idolatry, and other sins, which then much prevailed in the world. Those rulers and judges who did this, fulfilled God's purpose in their appointment; they wrought with God in his great providential design; they were people after his heart. This is obvious in the whole history of their kings. When any of them were condemned, (as many were,) for doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, it evidently has respect

to their mal-administration; their not enforcing God's laws; their neglecting his worship; encouraging idolatry; and by their corrupt government and evil example, causing Israel to sin.

Others are said to have done what was right in the sight of the Lord; and it is no less evidently said with respect to their public administrations; their watchful care for the laws and established religion. Thus it is said of Hezekiah: "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David, his father, did." He too was a man after God's heart, according as David, his father, was. And for what in particular, is this high commendation given? Wherein did his gratitude and fidelity consist? The words immediately following declare: "He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cast down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense unto it; and he called it Nehushtan, (as being nothing but a mere work of brass.) He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him." Thus Hezekiah is declared to be like David, and is equally approved of God. And as Hezekiah was approved and praised for his religious administration as a ruler of God's people, for the same we may believe was David approved.

In our text and the verse before it, David's character is contrasted with Saul's. After Saul had repeatedly, by disobedience in his public measures, manifested a want of steadfast trust in the word and promises of God, Samuel the prophet tells him,

“Thou hast done foolishly ; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee ; for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever ; but now thy kingdom shall not continue. The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.” Thus Saul was condemned and rejected, not for his immoralities as a private man, of which we know little or nothing, but for trusting too much in himself and his own wisdom. He did not consider that “to obey is better than sacrifice ;” in several instances he pursued public measures different from God’s particular direction. David, on the contrary, though like others, as a private man, he was not without sin ; yet as a king, was obedient and faithful ; in the public office to which he was appointed, he adhered with undeviating rectitude to the divine command. He fulfilled God’s purpose.

So Eli was a good man as a private individual, but as a priest and judge in Israel, he was not sufficiently strict in enforcing God’s law ; and for this cause only he was rejected, and Samuel raised to that office. “I will raise me up a faithful priest, said the Lord, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind.” They were both good men ; but Samuel, by adhering strictly to God’s directions, fulfilled his purpose, and became a man after his heart. In many other instances, and indeed generally, those kings and others who were faithful in their public ministrations, who suppressed idolatry, reformed the morals of the people, and enforced the

worship of God, and the observance of his laws, are highly commended. And those who neglected these duties of their office, who countenanced idolatry, and wickedly suffered the people to be corrupted like the heathen around them, are said to have “done evil in the sight of the Lord.” And we may add, that when the Israelites as a nation are highly praised; when they are called God’s inheritance and his elect; when said to be holy and righteous; a people keeping God’s covenant and statutes, and after his heart; when God does not see iniquity in Jacob, nor perverseness in Israel, regard is had to their professing and maintaining the true religion. As a nation holding a right faith, acknowledging the true God, and submitting to his laws, they are highly commended as God’s chosen people, and much beloved; but as to their morals and private life, they are often censured and much condemned.

Sometimes an individual was elected from the heathen for some particular purpose of divine providence, and is commended as having done God’s will. Thus, by the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said of Cyrus king of Persia, “He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure.” But how could a heathen and a worshipper of false gods, be said to be the Lord’s shepherd and do his will? The next words will show; it was by “saying to Jerusalem, thou shalt be built; and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid.” By the unseen hand of the true God, he was raised to power that he might be the instrument; or at least he was made the instrument of liberating the Jews from captivity, and of assisting them in rebuilding their city and temple. In doing this, he per-

formed a conspicuous and interesting part in God's providential system, and did God's pleasure; and to this we must limit the praise bestowed upon him, and not understand by his performing all God's pleasure, that his faith and his private life were according to truth and godliness.

We have then abundant reason for this high commendation bestowed upon the son of Jesse. Considering his situation, and trials, and the age he lived in, no man was ever more zealous and faithful in promoting the service of God, and a devout regard to religious ordinances. Few men if any, have experienced greater or more sudden changes, or passed through such varying vicissitudes of life; nor did any one ever rely upon God with more steadfastness and fidelity. Whether he is driven by the sword of persecution into exile, and hunted through the mountains and caves of the desert, or exalted to the most enviable splendours of a terrestrial throne, he never forgets that the Lord is God, nor puts his trust in worldly wisdom, or an arm of flesh. Solomon, his son, was so weak in his dotage as to compliment his heathen wives at the expense of true religion; he mingled idolatry with the worship of Jehovah; "he went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites;" whereupon, and for this corruption of God's worship, it is immediately added in the sacred history, that "Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord; and went not fully after the Lord, as David his father did;" for David did not at any time, nor in any instance, depart from, nor corrupt the worship of

God; as a king and judge in Israel, he was uniformly faithful.

In this sense then, in his public administration, as the Lord's anointed, as king of Israel, David was a man after God's own heart. As a private man, he "sinned, and did wickedly;" but he also repented, and "the Lord put away his sin;" he fell, but he rose again. There is no praise bestowed upon him in the holy scriptures, which can in any reason impeach their truth; nor will his example justify the faults of others, nor reasonably encourage any man to live in sin. Be faithful in your calling, as he was faithful, and you also "shall have praise of God." Repent of your sins as he repented, and you also shall be forgiven.

1. In this view of David's character, we learn some things which are highly important; and first, That all men are sinners. There is none good but one; Christ alone is a perfect pattern of a holy, religious life; he is the mark of the high prize for which we run. We have indeed the examples of many men comparatively good and faithful; their virtues we are to imitate; if they have faults, we are to shun them; and none of these examples are more worthy of a Christian's regard than David's. His faults are very conspicuous, and easily avoided; they are as rocks distinctly marked on the map of life; while his piety and zeal, his humility, devotion to God, and trust in his word and providence, are worthy of all men to be imitated. And yet, not unbelievers only, but some Christians seem to view the faults, recorded in the scriptures of good men in

favour with God, as great difficulties ; they seem to suppose that every one whom God approves, must be advanced to sinless perfection. And who then could be saved ? But the scriptures teach what experience confirms, that there is no such perfection in man. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” There are righteous men indeed ; but they are not so accounted for their own works ; in God’s word it is written, that “the just live by faith.” Could there be found in the scriptures one perfect, sinless character, besides that of Christ ; if Noah, Job, or Daniel were represented as without sin, this would be a difficulty indeed, which none of us could obviate ; which would be irreconcilable to the other parts of the scriptures. But in truth, as David himself tells us, “there is none who doeth good, (perfectly,) no, not one.”

2. From our subject we also learn, that the sins of other men cannot reasonably encourage us to live in sin. It is natural to think, and in their hearts at least, we fear that many say, that as David, who so wickedly transgressed, was yet accounted a good man, and was in favour with God, we, whose sins are not greater than his, can have no cause to fear. Will not God accept me as he did David ? Certainly he will, and on the same terms. If you have David’s piety, and penitence, and faith, you have no cause to fear. But this part, his repentance especially, and what with patience and resignation he suffered in consequence of his transgressions, people incline to overlook. Can you truly say with him, “I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me ?” If, like him, day after day, you have, from a

deep sense of your sins, fasted in sackcloth and ashes, and night after night have watered your couch with tears of contrition ; if seven times a day you earnestly supplicate God for mercy and grace, and in the deepest sufferings praise him for his goodness ; and if you are ready to leave an earthly throne, and prostrate yourself before the King of kings, with the utmost confidence, you may hope and be assured, that God will forgive and receive you. But when you sin without repenting, without humbling yourself before God, what is there in David's case to quiet conscience, and give you peace ? Consider too, what he suffered in consequence of his sins. Would you, for any sinful pleasures, feel the same contrition, and suffer the like judgments ? Behold him for the matter of Uriah, driven from his throne by a rebellious son, and rendered unhappy in his family through the remainder of his life. And yet, David thought these corrections a mercy, compared with the judgments which his sins deserved. No language could fully express his love and thankfulness to God who had put away his sins, and relieved him from " the bitter pains of eternal death."

In the history of David then, we find no peace to the wicked ; no encouragement to do evil, nor to live one day without repentance ; no ground of hope, that if you live in sin, grace will abound. It is of little use to inquire, whether your sins are greater or less than David's ; the main question is, are you a sinner, or are you not ? And to this momentous interrogation, let us take heed that we do not so answer as to make God a liar. We may, like the boasting pharisee, in our Lord's parable, say that we

are not as David and "other men," guilty of this transgression or that; but we have all come short of what God requires, and have but one way to his favour. Our language should be, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" our hope should be in the merits of our Saviour. Thus David prayed, and thus believed, and of course possessed a true Christian faith. This do and thou shalt live. "'The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

3. Finally, brethren, we are here taught to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. Let us well consider what is a Christian's vocation; it is to be truly the Saviour's disciple; to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." To make our calling and election sure; to fulfil God's gracious purpose in our holy vocation, and to be finally justified as righteous, we must possess that faith which renews the heart, which worketh by love; which keepeth the commandments of God; we must add to our faith virtue, and knowledge, and every Christian grace. Let your light so shine before men, as to honour your Christian profession; as to commend the faith of Christ to the esteem of others, and manifest the power and the excellence of his grace. Walk thus in the faith of Christ and fear of God, and you will be men after his heart. The example of David in the many and various trials to which he was called, will, if you rightly view them, assist you much in your vocation. He earnestly prayed for sanctification; to be cleansed from his secret faults, and he so deeply repented of his "pre-

sumptuous sins," that they did not get the dominion over him.

Endeavour like him, to be humble and submissive under the hand of God ; to repose unshaken trust in his gracious word, and righteous providence ; to claim nothing for your own righteousness ; to rest your hope in your Saviour ; to be zealous and active in serving God, and to perform faithfully every duty which appertains to that state of life to which you are called. Then shall God be your friend, and his blessing be ever with you. Though through the infirmities of a corrupt nature, and the remains of indwelling sin, you should sometimes be suddenly drawn into transgression, the Lord will not forsake you, but by his providence awaken you, as he did David, and as he did Peter, to repentance. From his own experience could David say, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down ; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." Thus let us use the scripture, and not abuse nor wrest them to our own destruction. May God mercifully grant us a right judgment in all things, and dispose our hearts to honour his name and do his will through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON XXX.



ON UNDERSTANDING THE SCRIPTURES; OR HOW TO ANSWER A FOOL.

Prov. xxvi. 4, 5.

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

THAT "the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God," is a declaration of his word, which may be extensively applied, and it is a declaration of which these remarkable words of Solomon, will illustrate the application. There are few things in which human wisdom is more occupied, than in minute criticism; and there are few things, which, in the holy scriptures, are less regarded. In many passages of the sacred volume, are what men please to call contradictions, though none of them are really contradictory. Texts may easily be found, which, to a superficial observer, or to one who regards the words more than the sense, will appear inconsistent, or not strictly correct. They who would find fault rather than truth; they especially, who would invalidate the authority of those scriptures which they are unwilling to obey, represent such passages as an evi-

dence of ignorance, or infirmity, or want of veracity in the penman ; and of course, a proof that the scriptures were not given by inspiration of God.

But it is a fact, as I propose in the present discourse to prove and illustrate, that what is thus and so often objected against the veracity of God's word, is what his Holy Spirit, in dictating that word, has totally disregarded. In no part of the Bible have the inspired writers affected precision, or manifested any regard to a critical exactness of expression. They tell us plain, important truths, in plain, intelligible language. He that runs may read, provided his heart is disposed to understand. But the wise are taken in their own craftiness. "With the froward, the Lord learns frowardness." From them who love darkness rather than light, the gospel is hid ; and they who seek for objections against the truth of divine revelation, are punished in being permitted to find them. Like the cloud between the hosts of Israel and of Egypt, the holy scriptures are a light by night to those who have eyes to see ; while they are darkness, even by day, to those who are enemies to the truths which they reveal.

It is certainly wonderful, and a powerful evidence of the truth of the bible, that so large a book, written by so many different hands, and at such remote periods of time, should in all its parts so perfectly accord in its subject, system, sentiments, and doctrines ; and while each writer has his own peculiar style, or manner of expression, that through the whole volume, they should all preserve the same dignified simplicity, and unity of design. As in other things, they also agree in this, in disregarding

verbal criticism, and a nice exactness of expression. Artful, designing men, are careful and well guarded in all their expressions; but truth and honesty have less regard to appearances. In every part of the scriptures do we see inattention, of this sort, which no deceiver would ever permit to pass. We might fill, not our sermon only, but a volume, with quotations which show that the inspired penman regarded chiefly the sense of what they wrote, without particular regard to the manner of expression. This is strikingly evident in their quoting the writings or words of others. When the writers of the New Testament cite, which they frequently do, passages from the Old, they are sure to give the true sense, but rarely the exact words. And this evidently they do, because they view this as being all that is essential, and for other reasons which we shall have occasion to notice. I speak now of the fact, which is remarkable and important, that they seldom give precisely the words of the passages which they quote. The four Evangelists, in relating the same speeches, give the sense indeed, but vary the expression. To give a few instances from a hundred, at the baptism of Jesus, St. Luke says, "A voice came from heaven which said, thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." St. Matthew relates it, "Lo a voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." St. Matthew, in another instance, tells us, that the woman of Canaan said to Jesus, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." According to Mark, she said, "Yes, Lord, yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." The inscription on

the cross of Christ is mentioned by all the Evangelists; but by no two of them precisely in the same words. In Mark, it is simply "The King of the Jews." In Luke, "This is the King of the Jews." In Matthew, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." And in John, "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." Nothing surely was more easy, than to have been precise and exact in these and very many like instances; and as they did it not, no inference can be more just, than that they did not deem it essential.

And not only do we find in the inspired writers such variations as we have noticed, but what is still more remarkable, the same writer, when repeating the same history, or citing again the same passage, does it in different words, omitting or adding circumstances. Thus St. Luke, in the twenty-fourth chapter of his gospel, gives this short account of Christ's ascension: "He led his disciples out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." In the first chapter of the Acts, the same apostle gives a more particular account of the same event, and does it not only in different words, but he relates circumstances, which, though no way inconsistent, are entirely different from those mentioned in his gospel.

These variations, I repeat, are not in a few instances, but even so common, and of such nature, as to evince, past all question, that by the sacred writers, they were deemed totally unexceptionable, and unworthy of being noticed as blemishes or objections.

St. Luke probably, and St. John certainly, wrote their gospels after those of Matthew and Mark were published and well known. How easily then, had they supposed it of any use, might they, without the aid of inspiration, have made their narratives literally and verbatim, correspond with those preceding. And had they been governed by worldly wisdom, had they been writing "cunningly devised fables," this would have been their natural course; and the course which they have pursued, is an additional proof, that they were not guided by the wisdom of man, but by that which the Holy Ghost teaches. Their chief concern was not with words, but facts and truths; "not with excellency of speech," but with the doctrines of eternal life.

The same may be said of what are called contradictions in the sacred writers; the most of them are but instances of this disregard to verbal exactness. Thus in the fifteenth chapter of the first book of Samuel, "The strength of Israel (that is God,) will not lie, nor repent, for he is not a man, that he should repent." Yet in many parts of the scriptures, and twice in that same chapter, it is said that God repented. This is perfectly intelligible and consistent to those who are truly lovers of religious truth. Those cases in which God does never repent, are those in which his word is pledged; for he cannot lie, nor be unfaithful. But in other cases where his threatenings, or his promises are conditional, he varies the dealings of his providence according to the sins, or the repentance of his people. In such case he is said to repent; and no other word can so

simply, and so forcibly convey to our minds a sense of his justice or of his mercy.

How surprising is this declaration of our Saviour, found in the tenth chapter of Matthew. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword." Came not to send peace! What was the declaration of the angel sent from heaven to announce his birth? "Peace on earth, and good-will towards men." What was the legacy which he left his people at his death? "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." The whole tenor of his life, and all the doctrines of his gospel, chiefly inculcate love, and peace, and good-will among mankind. One of his most distinguishing titles is, "Prince of Peace." Did he come to bring a sword, the effect of whose gospel is designated by beating swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks? He tells us that he came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; and teaches us not to render evil for evil; to suffer injuries rather than yield to contention; to love and pray for, and do good to all men, our enemies not excepted. Most certainly he did come to bring peace on earth; this was the chief object, and is to a great extent, the blessed fruit of his advent. In what sense then, did he "come to bring a sword? To set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother?" The meaning is sufficiently evident to those who truly desire to understand. The gospel is not designed to produce such evils, but to oppose them, and drive all enmity and contention from the earth. Yet the fact

is but too evident, that in a thousand unhappy instances, from the opposition it meets with, and from the corruption of men, mistaking its nature, and abusing its blessings, it has caused such evils ; it has been made the occasion of many and great persecutions and wars, and the shedding of rivers of blood. And evidently it was wise and good in our Saviour to forewarn his disciples of these evils, that they might be prepared to meet them ; and that when they happened, being the fulfilment of prophecy, they might confirm Christians in their faith, and so turn out for the furtherance of the gospel.

There is an instance of what men call contradiction in the history of Paul's conversion. In the ninth chapter of the Acts it is said, "The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." In the twenty-second chapter, Paul, relating the same thing, says, "They that were with me, saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but heard not the voice of him that spake to me." This is not indeed a contradiction, because both may be literally true : the men might, and doubtless did hear a voice ; and yet they might not hear the voice of him that spake to Saul : the voice they heard might proceed from some other person or thing. But the true sense probably is, that they heard the sound of the speaker's voice, but could not hear so as to perceive what was most essential, the words spoken : they could not understand what was said. And this at least we must surely believe, that St. Luke understood what he wrote ; and supposing that he wrote by human wisdom only, would he, or would any one, have been so stupid as to give, in the same book, contradictory

accounts of the same transaction? In the accounts, however, which he has given of it, he shows an utter disregard of such minute criticism; and that his object was to declare things of infinitely greater concern.

In the seventh chapter of Jeremiah it is written, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Put your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices. But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you." And yet we know that God did speak unto their fathers, and very much concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, when he brought them from Egypt. The evident meaning here is, that the people had become so corrupt, it was of no importance whether they burnt their sacrifice upon the altar, or eat it to satisfy their hunger; that God would not accept such offerings; that to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams: and that the external rites of religion were of little use or worth, but as they were offered in a true faith, and accompanied by a performance of the weightier matters of the law. The meaning is good, and the expression forcible; and it is perfectly intelligible and satisfactory to those who are willing that divine truth should be brought home forcibly to their hearts. Jeremiah knew as well as any one, what the Lord had commanded their fathers; he knew too the value of minute criticism,

and shows here and elsewhere in what estimation he holds it.

Lest I should exhaust your patience by these examples, I will add that only which is contained in our text. Here we have a contradiction in words; the wise man says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly." And in the very next sentence seems to reverse the precept; "Answer a fool according to his folly." There is no contradiction in the bible more direct than this. But we trust that there is no one who will venture to say, that it proceeds from any ignorance, or infirmity, or deception in the penman; or that here is any reason for doubting of his inspiration. Most evidently Solomon was aware of this contradiction, and designed that these sentences should be expressed and should be read just as we find them. And we may safely add, that it is not possible that man, with all his wisdom, should express them better, or convey the sense more strongly to the mind. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like unto him." That is, do not so answer him as to partake of his folly. Do not imitate his profane, scurrilous, or abusive language; render not railing for railing, nor use any false reasoning. Whatever another may say; however unreasonable, or false, or provoking may be his speech or words, let wisdom keep the portal of your lips; avoid whatever is vain, or contrary to good sense and true religion.

But it does not follow that you must be silent, and not answer at all. It is fitting that folly should be suitably reprov'd, and put, if not to silence, at least to shame. You are not to submit to impertinence, cavilling, or profaneness, in such manner that ungod-

liness may triumph, and truth be disgraced. There is a sense in which you must “answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit;” lest he should vainly imagine that his nonsense is agreeable to reason and truth. Let your answer be so judiciously adapted to his case, that his folly may be exposed; and if he is not himself ashamed, that others may not be deluded by his impertinence, or vain confidence of boasting. Your words and discourse should be so far conformed to the foolishness of others, as to teach them the wisdom which they need, without being like them. Of this we have many fine examples in the history of our blessed Saviour.

We see then, that the greater part of those supposed inaccuracies and contradictions which minute criticism has objected against the scriptures, are what the sacred writers, and the Holy Ghost who inspired them, have deemed unworthy of consideration. They “come not to you with excellency of speech, or of man’s wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.” They have a noble simplicity of style, which no pen, uninspired, can equal. And though it is loose, and not according to the strictest rules of human art, it is wonderfully suited to the stupendous object of the inspired writers. They have a peculiar manner, dictated by the wisdom which is from above, and perfectly adapted to their sacred purpose. They are so written, that each portion is more active, and less dependant on a logical connection with other parts of the same volume, or same book, or same chapter. This leaves them liable to more objections on account of difficulties; but even these difficulties have their use; they cause people of serious mind to inquire with more diligence and care. The scriptures are,

in consequence, more read, and God's will better known. And when, by thus searching the scriptures, their consistency and excellence are discovered, conviction is more powerful, and faith is strengthened. In human compositions, many defects are artfully concealed ; we have a fair exterior, filled with imperfection : but the word of God, while regardless of appearance, is all glorious within. The bible is to other books, like the productions of nature to the works of human art. To a superficial observer, the latter is more attractive. The artificial grove is preferred to the natural forest. Men are more delighted with the mechanism of a watch, than with the formation of an insect. But were the latter fully understood, the wisdom of the former would be but as foolishness in comparison. In the one case, all the excellency is apparent and immediately seen. The other requires deep investigation, but its perfections are more and more unfolded ; and what was at first thought a blemish, proves to be an astonishing work of Omnipotence and wisdom. The study of the scriptures is like that of natural philosophy, an exhaustless source of wisdom and knowledge.

There are other advantages and good effects resulting from this seeming carelessness and inaccuracy of the inspired writers. It shows that they practised no manner of artifice ; that they wrote in honest simplicity, what they actually knew, or undoubtingly believed. It shows that there was no collusion among them ; no device of man's wisdom ; no conspiracy to deceive. They were at no manner of pains to solve difficulties, nor to prevent, nor to obviate objections ; they did nothing to save appearances, nor to preserve consistency, either with themselves or each other.

We have truth here in the wild state of nature, leaving it with the industry of man to reduce it to that artificial order which he delights in. It is like gold in its pure state, which men form and fashion into ornaments, and vessels, and coin, according as fancy dictates, or use requires. And is not this the truth of God?

There is the further advantage in this manner of the inspired writers, that they exemplify the sense and doctrine of our text; they “answer not a fool according to his folly;” they are not conformed to that worldly wisdom, which is foolishness with God. They are in nothing conformed to the corrupt desires, or vicious taste, or idle curiosity of mankind. To things of little importance, or mere temporal concern, they have little regard; and especially to minister to objections or verbal criticisms. They show how useless and vain it is to hunt for little blemishes, and neglect important truth; to be occupied in criticisms “which gender strife,” and “minister questions, rather than godly edifying.” And yet they answer every fool so as to expose and correct his folly; they show that they who are wise in their own opinion, may be in God’s sight the most destitute of true wisdom; that what is highly esteemed by man, is with him an abomination. “Where is the wise? where the scribe? where the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” They who will obstinately oppose their own reason to the wisdom of God, are left to perish in their folly. The word of God is not intended to gratify the pride or curiosity of man, but to make them wise unto salvation.

We may add too, as an inference of no small importance, that the veracity of the holy scriptures is not materially affected by any little inaccuracies,

omissions, or even interpolations, which may very possibly have happened by the carelessness or the ignorance of transcribers, or by other means. The truth and entireness of this sacred volume, do not depend on every word and syllable being preserved in the same form, but on the sense and doctrine being complete. It is owing to this peculiar excellence in the style and manner of the holy scriptures, that, though they are translated into hundreds of different languages, and, as will naturally happen, though the translations vary in many of these smaller things from each other, they may all be truly considered as the word of God, and a safe guide in morals and religion.

It is another advantage of this scriptural style, that as before intimated, it awakens the attention; sets us to search for the meaning and purpose of the scriptures, and not to content ourselves with the beauty of composition, or the sound of words. Of course we are better acquainted with their sacred doctrine; the scriptures are better understood.

In making improvement from this subject, reflect on the danger and the folly of searching the scriptures for these little difficulties, and of viewing them as objections; while you overlook the grand design, and that most benevolent object, which is to save your soul. Regard not the beauty of the casket, but the divine treasure which it contains. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" God takes the wise in their own craftiness. If from the pride or perverseness of our heart, we reject the doctrines of life, and look only for difficulties and objections, we shall be punished in being allowed to find them. In this way does the Lord answer a fool according to his folly; he chastises the presumption of cavillers, by

leaving them in their blindness. "If our gospel be hid, it is hid from" such. The holy scriptures do indeed possess excellencies of style and composition, which will be admired as long as true taste and pure moral feeling shall continue in the world; yet we are to study them not for the excellence of their language, but that we may be wise unto salvation.

And though the bible is not like an artificial chain of reasoning, which depends on the soundness of every link; though each part contains in itself the revealed truth of God; yet the various parts throw light upon each other, and what seems doubtful and obscure in one place, will be clearly expressed in another. In regard to what may seem blemishes, you are to view it as one whole. Who would judge of a temple, from some defect in a single stone? Who would deny that a stately tree is a beautiful object, and a noble production of nature, because some small branch may be withered, or some of its leaves be in disorder? And yet he is no wiser who stumbles on little inaccuracies of the sacred volume, and disregards the grand design. While detecting a faded leaf, he is insensible to all the profusion of nature's charms. Great evils and unhappy divisions among Christians, have arisen from construing particular passages in a sense different from the general tenor and design of the sacred volume. On any doubtful passage, the bible at large is the best commentary. The marginal references in our English bibles, are of use in understanding many passages. From good commentators also, and good sermons, much may be learned. But still better, is a humble, sincere and praying heart. From those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; who are honestly disposed to receive instruction, and diligently

seek that they may find, truth will not long be withholden. Seek thus and you shall find; what seems dark or doubtful, will be cleared to your view; difficulties will be removed, and objections obviated; "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

And more especially should you regard what our text more immediately proposes. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, (says an apostle) that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man;" that you may so answer a fool as both to escape and rebuke his folly. Let your conversation be ever so conducted as neither to say any thing contrary to divine wisdom, nor to countenance such foolishness in others. It is a great thing and difficult to govern the tongue. The meekest of men was once so provoked by fools, "that he spake unadvisedly with his lips," and to his own hurt. Our Saviour has in this, as in all other things, given us a perfect example. "When he was reviled he reviled not again." To the most malicious adversaries, and to the most artful and ensnaring questions, he returned such wise answers, and so rebuked their folly, that "they held their peace, and durst not from that time ask him any more (such) questions." Sometimes it is most wise to be silent, especially when good words will be as pearls cast before swine. This did our Lord on some few occasions. There was a time when the psalmist "held his tongue and said nothing; he kept silence, even from good discourse; but it was a pain and grief unto him." It must, to a good man, ever be painful to be in a situation where good discourse will have no good effect.

In most cases, however, something profitable may be said, if it be wisely adapted to the occasion.

“Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not,” in the one sense, answer him according to his folly; he durst not “bring against him a railing accusation;” but in the other sense of our text, he did so answer him; for he “said, The Lord rebuke thee.” And so much at least it is often expedient to say, that folly may be put to shame. We must “leave off wrath, and let go displeasure,” and never partake of the folly of any discourse. If the name of God be profaned; if religion be ridiculed; if sacred things are lightly treated, or, what is a very common thing, if the frailties, or mistakes of religious men are made the subject of sport and laughter, you should be careful not to join in the merriment, nor give countenance to any such like profaneness. Never join in any laugh at the expense of religion; nor in any levity or indecent mirth. We are to live soberly, as well as righteously.

But to avoid evil is not the whole of our duty; we must also, with wisdom and discretion, oppose it. Manifest, on all suitable occasions, your decided disapprobation of whatever is vain, and foolish, and sinful. Do it also, according to the wisdom given you, in such manner as shall have the best effect: in such manner, as to make men ashamed of their impiety, and afraid to offend God.

That at all times, and in all places, we may have wisdom so to speak, and so to refrain, as to suppress ungodliness, and promote the fear of God, and the salvation of men, the Lord mercifully grant through Jesus Christ. Amen.

